

SECRETS OF MOTHERING

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College of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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in the Department of Educational Administration,
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Saskatoon
by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mom, Irene Murray, who loved me unconditionally. She taught me to look at the sky and to also reach for the stars. She taught me the power of secrets, the challenges and power of a being a woman and the joys of being a mom.

To you mom,

When you read this you will nod and smile because you will know:

There was a young man loved a maid

Who taunted him, "Are you afraid,"

She asked, "to bring me today

Your mother's head upon a tray?"

He went and slew his mother dead,

Tore from her breast her heart so red,

Then towards his lady love he raced,

But tripped and fell in all his haste.

As the heart rolled on the ground

It gave forth a plaintive sound.

And it spoke, in accents mild:

"Did you hurt yourself, my child?"

(As cited in Ruddick, 1989, p.10)

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This dissertation is also dedicated in memory of my dad, Vic Murray, who died suddenly on December 4, 2004 just as I began my PhD work. I wish you were here today, Dad.

To my mom and dad; you were an amazing couple! I feel privileged to be your daughter.

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In My Secret Life

I smile when I'm angry

I cheat and I lie

I do what I have to do

To get by.

But I know what is wrong

And I know what is right

And I'd die for the truth

In my secret life.

I bite my lip

I bide what I'm told

But I'm always alone

And my heart is like ice

And it's crowded and cold

In my secret life.

(Leonard Cohen, In My Secret Life, *Live In London*)

PREFACE

As I write this piece, I wonder how I got here. I began with an interest in adolescent mental health services in schools. Then I was captured by autoethnographic writing and Carolyn Ellis became my hero. I read everything I could find regarding autoethnography and mostly I read autoethnographic stories. This led me to wanting to tell my own stories, but I realized they were very difficult stories to tell and very difficult stories to hear. I became interested in why certain stories are difficult to tell. I wanted to know what made them difficult stories. I wanted to understand why we tell certain things more easily than others or why we don't tell at all. I then became interested in secrets. I realized that my personal secrets were mostly about mothering. I wondered what it was about mothering that made these stories so difficult to tell. I wondered what was unique and specific to the secrets of mothering. I read extensively about mothering and motherhood. I was exhilarated when I found the work of Andrea O'Reilly and the Association for Research on Mothering at a book fair at a local conference. I had found another hero. Then I read Susan Maushart (1999) and Adrienne Rich (1986) and I became immersed in the search for meaning about motherhood, mothering, the masks of motherhood and the normative discourse of mothering.¹ I realized there was a disconnect between the discourse of mothering and the actual practice of mothering. I also began to realize that perhaps the masks of motherhood and the normative discourse contributed to and perpetuated the secrets of mothering. I tell my own

¹ “The term motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word mothering refers to the woman's experience of mothering which is female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women” (O'Reilly 2007, p. 11). I use mothering consistently to refer to my experience and practice of mothering. Even though my practice of mothering was not always defined by me and other mothers, I did strive for a practice of mothering that was in fact empowered. I use motherhood to refer to Maushart's mask of motherhood and to other authors who use that term.

secrets of mothering to examine this phenomenon. And I tell stories that I never thought I would tell in a public forum. My stories look behind my cool and competent “mask of motherhood” (Maushart, 1999), and expose the raw emotions of my secrets of mothering. I am often vulnerable and naked and I ask readers to appreciate this in context of their own nakedness and vulnerability. An exploration of the discourse and practice of mothering, and the secrets related to that, offers a means to disturb the normative discourse of mothering and a means to unravel my secrets of mothering. I offer no solutions only hope and possibility that the disturbing and unraveling will guide mothers and parents to decide which mask to wear (or not) and which secrets to keep (or not) and perhaps to awaken readers to the social and political issues related to these stories (both mine and the readers). I introduce and provide the background for the dissertation through my positionality in Tomasulo’s chair. I will give no other explanation of the chair except to say that I move in and out of the chair as I explore the purpose of my dissertation and position myself within that exploration.



I

TOMASULO'S CHAIR

Listen to my voice; it is a blend of many voices. I am [a graduate student, a nurse, a mom, a daughter, a friend, a colleague, a faculty member]; the quantity of potential identities extends to infinity.

Carol Rambo Ronai (1992, p. 102)

The day I told my story was a beautiful spring day on campus.

* * *

The leaves are beginning to bud, the grass is showing promising signs of green, the air feels warm and fresh and the sun is shining brightly in the prairie sky. There are sights, sounds and smells of spring everywhere; the birds are chirping boisterously, the trees are blowing gently, the air smells green and the sun feels warm and inviting.

I love this campus with its field stone décor, its consistent and grandiose architecture and its magnificent trees and green space. The evergreens and other prairie trees will soon fill out to contrast and complement the silver Russian Olives, and soon the flowers will be planted and the campus will become a sight to behold once again.

I am walking across campus on a Friday morning and wondering what the day will bring. It is the second day of a workshop focusing on Interactive Behavioral Therapy (IBT) (Razza & Tomasulo, 2005), a type of interactive group therapy for people with developmental disabilities. Yesterday was wonderful. It was so interesting, and Dr. Tomasulo was so engaging. I am looking forward to the day knowing we will learn more about the process and actually take part in interactive sessions. We had one such session the day before as one of

the teacher/participants spoke of her concerns and hopes for the students she worked with. She sat in the chair and told her story, and we, in turn, attempted to speak from her perspective and internalize her feelings and reflect them back as if we were speaking from a space within her. I felt very emotional with the telling of her story and with how difficult but also rewarding her work was. The whole process intrigued me, and I was anxious to learn more. I was also convinced that I would not be volunteering to sit in the chair today. Not because I didn't want to but because the emotion would be too much.

I am at the workshop with a broad range of people: members of an inter-professional team I work with at a school, former students, and other health care professionals and educators. Some I know well; others I know only slightly. I felt emotional yesterday just hearing someone else's story and could not imagine sitting in the chair with these other people in the room. Yes, I am definitely convinced I will not be sitting in that chair today.

* * *


Perhaps the chair represents disclosure to me. Perhaps it represents the loss of my secrets, the vulnerability of letting others see who I am, the emotions I hold so tight, the concerns and uncertainties I try desperately to hide. Have I, and perhaps other nurses in general, been socialized to some degree to the idea that professionalism and emotionality do not go together? I struggle with this sense of separating, and I wonder if the development of multiple selves protects the vulnerable self that is really at the core of what may be seen as the "real self," the self without a façade, the self left open for all to see. I also wonder if this separating or

compartmentalization contributes to keeping parts of myself hidden and encourages secrecy to some degree.

I imagine we all have secrets and we decide whom we will tell our secrets to or not. People live with secrets, and people die with secrets. My sense is that people live because of secrets, and people die because of secrets. Secrets protect the innocent, and they protect the guilty. It may be a common struggle whether (or not) we should tell our secrets, whether (or not) we should tell others' secrets, and/or whether (or not) we should probe, uncover or invade secrecy.

Yesterday Dr. Tomasulo spoke of reliving traumas. He spoke of re-experiencing past traumas with the experience of a present trauma. I think about that now in relation to my experience and somehow it makes sense. I think about Jordan's motor vehicle accident, the impact it had on our family, and the overwhelming reaction we all had. Could it have been that we were reliving past trauma with the trauma of the accident? But the trauma of the accident was safe to talk about. It was safe and acceptable to talk about the details. It was safe to talk about that trauma, the anger, the pain, the anxiety and the fear, but all the feelings from the past trauma came rushing back like the tide, unstoppable, inevitable; only now it was safe to let the tide come in.

I remember the day of Jordan's accident and the vision, the sense of knowing what was happening without being there. I hate having that sixth sense; I never know if it will come true or not.



I am just leaving my office and a flash goes through my mind. I see my son Jordan being hit by a car as he crosses a street. "Oh God, this can't be happening!" I think to myself.

I have had these visions before, not often, and they don't always come true. I try to calm myself down and talk myself out of this feeling of panic. McLeay, my oldest son, had called me earlier to see if Jordan could go over to his place for a visit and if I would pick Jordan up later. I am on my way to pick up Jordan and as I proceed to shut my office door I decide I should call McLeay. He will answer the phone and tell me Jordan is beating him at a video game, or they are having ice cream or a slurpy or something, that they are okay, everything is fine. I won't even have to tell him about this vision because I will know everything is fine as soon as he answers the phone. I call his number, no answer, panic again, "Oh God, what if Jordan is hurt? What do I do?"

I always go home over the university bridge, which goes right by Royal University Hospital emergency, (somehow I know that is where he will be); I will just drop in and see if he is there. Based on what?? People will think I am crazy! "Oh, by the way, is my son here? I just had a feeling he was in an accident. Can you help me?"

I rush down to my car, and drive as quickly as I can, but I don't go over the university bridge. It seems that if I don't drive by ER, if I do something different, then it won't have happened. Maybe they are playing outside, or maybe they went out with one of McLeay's friends. But McLeay doesn't have a car, and he is low on cash so there doesn't seem to be any logical explanation for them not answering the phone. But then, how logical is a car accident?

I drive home over the freeway, my mind racing, my heart pounding. The traffic is moving so slowly. Can't they tell I am in a hurry? I'm sick. I just want to get home and find out everything is okay. I pray; I talk out loud; I try to make sense of these feelings and the fear, the utter terror that this might be true, that it might really be happening.

I run into the house. My daughter Eve is on the phone. She says into the phone, "She has just come in the door now; we'll be right over." She hangs up the phone and looks at me and says, "Mom." I search her face; she looks so scared, so concerned.

I say, "Jordan's been hit by a car!" She nods and I scream.

Me scream? I can't believe that, even to this day. I have been known for my calm, my composure, my ability to calm others, my ability to compartmentalize, (after all, haven't I had a lot of practice?) Life experience taught me how to do that; working in a small rural hospital reinforced it, running from the happy delivery room to a palliative care room. Even last year when our lives fell apart when Jordan told his story, even then I remained calm, tried to do what needed to be done.

"Why am I falling apart now? Why can't I stay calm? Why am I swearing? Why am I screaming?" I wonder. Poor Eve, she has had to look after me on too many occasions; she has had to grow up too quickly. She is the one who is calm; she is trying her hardest to get me into the car, and I am asking her twenty questions that she does not know the answers to: "How bad is he hurt? Is he talking? How did it happen? Is McLeay okay?" I inquire.

"Yes," she says, "that was him on the phone."

"What was McLeay doing? How did this happen?" I demand. I think to myself, "It's too soon from the last trauma. How much is a family supposed to endure? Why us? Why now? We haven't even recovered from the last time. We will never really recover from that; it was too much. Why is it taking so long to get to the hospital?"

I am swearing at the other drivers and hanging on as tight as I can to the overhead strap above the door. I am in a panic, I feel like I am going to blow up and disintegrate, I can hardly breathe, but I am still talking a mile a minute, still asking those ridiculous questions that Eve cannot answer. Poor Eve!! "What if it's a head injury? What if he's paralyzed?" I keep asking, knowing she does not have the answer.

Jordan already has a tough enough life; we are just starting to sort out how we can help him cope (help all of us cope) with the last tragedy. "How can this be happening to Jordan? He is so sweet, so caring, and so innocent - or he was innocent," I think.

"What if he has a head injury? He is already mentally retarded." I can't believe I just said that.

I hate that word. I give kids a little speech when I hear them use "retard" or "retarded." Lots of people use that term now, even adults, not to refer to the mentally challenged but to their friends or to things that are stupid.

"Oh Jordan, I just need to see you, NOW! What is taking so long? I can't stand this!"

Poor Eve, how can she stand me? She must want to put a sock in my mouth, I want to put a sock in my mouth, I can't shut-up, even when I try, I have never done this before, I am ALWAYS calm. What is this about? It's too much, just too much. How much more can we take??

We finally arrive at the hospital. I tell Eve I am okay. I will be calm now. I know if I keep this up they won't let me in to see Jordan. I have seen a lot of crazy mothers in ER. Now I know what that terror feels like, but I AM calm. We walk in, and I ask to see my son. They try to get me to sit down and wait. I hear Jordan hollering and crying (a good sign). Some intern is trying to steer me away from the trauma room. I tell him I am going in and Eve tells him, "Don't try to stop my mom."

I reassure him that I am fine and I AM. I see Jordan; his leg is obviously broken. (I can handle that). He is hollering and answering the nurses' questions (another good sign). Then I see McLeay. Oh God he looks awful! He is white, and he looks like he has the weight of world on his shoulders. "What happened?" I wonder.

I can't ask him that now. I need to make sure Jordan is okay. I am asking lots of questions and am getting answers. Everyone seems to be a bit dismissive, but I persist. I think, "His head looks like a big pumpkin," and I say, "Obvious head injury." I used to work in neurosurgical intensive care. As a nurse, I know he needs a CT scan. As a mom, I want someone to tell me everything is okay and I can take him home. I inquire about a CT and McLeay says, "You need to x-ray his head; look at it!"

"Everything is okay, Jordan is talking, he is orientated, his pupils are equal and reacting," the doctor says reassuringly.

"I disagree," I say "His pupils are sluggish."

I'm worried, but I also like it when they tell me he is okay. I would be quite happy to take him home. Lee the nurse is worried, concerned, but Lee the mom wants it all to be okay; I like to hear things are fine, but I'm not being objective, as if a mom whose child has been seriously injured can be objective.

I know now that I should have been more insistent on getting a CT scan done, and I should have insisted he be admitted to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit rather than Pediatric Observation, but Lee the mom would have been happy to take him home.

Jordan is in pain. They splint his leg and give him some analgesic and all he wants is to make sure his mom is there and his brother is okay. He keeps asking for Dr Carter, "Where's Dr. Carter? Get Dr. Carter!" (Dr. Carter is his favorite doctor on 'ER'. Jordan and I watch it every Thursday on TV. It is a ritual now, every Thursday 'ER' and popcorn.) We will do that again soon!

The road ahead is going to be tough, but we don't know that yet. We are just happy to have Jordan alive, and where is that "Dr. Carter"? He would make things better.

When I think back to the accident and what Dr. Tomasulo said yesterday about reliving past trauma with a present trauma, it gives me a better understanding of the experience. I didn't realize following Jordan's accident that the past trauma was being relived by our family. We reacted to the accident more intensely then because of the prior trauma. I am wondering if I will learn more about that today at the workshop.

The workshop begins with a number of interactive exercises encouraging us to identify different people in the group we could connect with at different levels. We do this by simply touching them on the shoulder. One of the questions is, "Who do you feel you could talk to?" I am surprised at the number of people who identify me and the reasons why: "It seems you would be easy to talk to." "I think I could tell you things." "You seem like you would listen and understand." "I feel like you would be able to hear me and not tell others; you would be able to hold my secrets."

"Yes, I am very good at keeping secrets," I think to myself. I have come by it honestly as they say. I have learned how to keep secrets. I have been told not to tell. I am confused by secrets, and I am in awe of secrets. I remember reading Sissela Bok's (1989) discussion of this dichotomy of secrets:

We are all, in a sense, experts on secrecy. From earliest childhood we feel its mystery and attraction. We know both the power it confers and the burden it imposes. We learn how it can delight, give breathing space, and protect. But we come to understand its dangers, too: how it is used to oppress and exclude; what can befall those who come too close to secrets they are not meant to share; and the price of betrayal. (p. xv)

Secrets remain a mystery to me. I am interested in an inquiry into secrets, and in particular, secrets related to mothering.

Perhaps mothering and being mothered has taught me to keep certain secrets. Is my secret-keeping connected to learned behavior, socialization, or perhaps to hiding behind a mask, always trying to look and feel happy, never criticizing anyone's behaviour, especially not that of my family? Is it about projecting a certain image, not burdening others with problems, or avoiding exposure to possible criticism and judgment? Is it about keeping family matters private and tightly enclosed within the family and working very hard not to let them seep out? Or is it about protecting not only myself but also others? I want to explore my mom's secrets because I have a sense they are related to mine. Understanding her stories and secrets may help me to understand mine: "Behind all [my] stories is always [my] mother's story because hers is where [mine] begins" (Albom, 2006, p. 194).

My mom seemed to have many secrets from her family of origin. I found out about them from the wrong people usually, and I found out much later than I felt I should have. My girlfriend in high school told me my mom was married once before she married my dad. She was married briefly to her high school sweetheart before he was killed in the Royal Navy. Why that was kept a secret I don't know or understand. Even after I knew, I was reluctant to ask questions or talk about it with her. Even as an adult when I had children of my own, I was still hesitant to talk about her first marriage.

I remember the time I gave her the book.



I wake up in the night and can't go back to sleep. I have a dreaded sense of loss and emptiness. My stomach feels hollow and empty. I hurt all over and feel incredibly sad and alone. I wonder, "Is this related to the book? Have I been dreaming about it? Is this what it feels like to lose a husband? To know you will never see him again? To say good-bye without ever dreaming you would not be reunited soon?"

Lost at sea. It sounds so dark, alone, distant, and scary. I feel cold and hot at the same time and it seems difficult to breath. I am confused for a moment; I don't know where these feelings are coming from. Is it the book? It must be the book. I felt the same way when I first read the passage in the book:

Morelli, J.L., SLt Royal Navy
Sub-Lieutenant (HMS Merganser RN pilot). John Louis Morelli of Plunkett died 19451115 and is commemorated on the Lee on Solent Memorial, Portsmouth, Hampshire, England, for members of the Fleet Air Arm who died with no known grave. Morellis' family came to a farm northeast of Plunkett from Sondrio in northern Italy near the Swiss border in 1912. John was educated at Badger school and Plunkett and enlisted in the RCAF in 1943. He was released just before the war's end, but re-enlisted in the Royal Navy as a flying instructor. Morelli was married just before returning to England, and died with two students when their Barracuda aircraft stalled joining a formation just off the coast of Scotland. (Barry, 2005, p. 325).

I've read this passage several times since. I don't know if I should give Mom the book. I don't know how she will react. "Will she be upset with me? Will it upset her?" I worry.

I bought the book as a Christmas gift for her, but I can't decide what to do. "Am I afraid of what her reaction might be Christmas morning? Or am I afraid I may not have an opportunity to give it to her if I wait?" I wonder.

My dad died suddenly just before Christmas last year, and I didn't get to give him the gift I was so excited about. Perhaps I know things can happen without warning, and I don't want to take a chance. I decide to give it to her early.

She is so pleased when I read it to her. She says, "I was afraid that because he had joined the British Navy he would not be remembered in Canadian history."

I ask her, "Did you know he had been discharged and yet re-enlisted?"

She looks at me as if I have two heads. "Of course I knew; I was his wife," she replies. "Of course we talked about it. He wanted to return and join the British Navy so he could fly and land planes on an aircraft carrier," she explains.

I ask, "Was his plan to stay in the Navy and you would join him?"

She responds, "No, he was planning on coming back and becoming a dentist. He always wanted to be a dentist and his parents would have been able to help him. He was their only son, and he had four sisters."

As my mom says this, a memory is triggered.

I remember visiting his parents and sister when I was younger. I didn't know who they were, (although I was old enough to) and I couldn't understand why everyone was crying and why they were hugging my mom so tightly. They were Italian and had a small vineyard in

British Columbia. I don't remember much else. We sat in the backyard on a patio that had a surrounding trellis with grape vines. It was hot that day, and it seemed like my mom didn't want to leave. I wonder, "Was she trying to hold onto something that she had lost? Did she feel connected to him there with his family?" I am wondering this now, because I didn't even know about him then. I didn't know my mom was married before. I didn't know anything about it, and I have always wondered why.

I wish I could remember what my dad was doing during that visit and how he was reacting. I could never figure out why my mom's first marriage was such a secret (I still can't). However, although I felt such a strong connection to him (John Morelli) when I read the passage to my mom, I also felt some kind of betrayal of my dad. It was strange because I never did understand how Mom talking about her first marriage was a betrayal to Dad, yet I was feeling it too. Are mothers and daughters so connected? Do I feel the same need to keep secrets as a way of protecting others or myself?

The sharing of this secret creates a new bond and understanding between my mom and me. As I come to understand more details of her story and her secret, I begin to also understand that the keeping of her secret may not be so much about the secret itself as about the effects of telling on others, particularly those close to her. I also wonder if my own secrets are locked in a similar box of protection, betrayal and, perhaps, perceived shame.

I say to Mom, "Life is funny; different roads and sliding doors." She agrees and we both are silent, perhaps thinking about how different her life could have/would have been if John hadn't died at sea.

She says, "You would have liked him; he was lots of fun, and a good dancer too." Too, meaning a good dancer like my dad. My dad was an incredibly smooth and fabulous dancer. She says, "I wish you could have seen your dad and I do the jive in our prime."

"Me too," I reply.

I think to myself, "Who was this John Morelli?" I like saying his name.

I wonder, "Why do I want to know? Why am I so curious about this man? Why do I want to know what my mom's and his relationship was like? Was it different from her relationship with my dad? Was he a gentler man than my dad? Did my mom love him more or just first? Did she know my dad when she married John?"

She continues, "I was young, only nineteen. My mom wanted me to wait until John got back to get married."

"I am glad you didn't wait," I tell her.

"He was supposed to be home for Christmas. Another sad Christmas," she says.

John died November 15, 1945, and my dad died December 4, 2004.

"Another sad Christmas," I say.

She continues, "I got a letter saying John was missing. I had an uncle in England and I contacted him and asked him to investigate. After a period of time, I received a letter from John's friend, and he told me what had happened. John's plane had gone down over the North Sea."

I think of the irony. The war was over and his plane stalled. How cruel. What was he thinking about as the plane went down? My mom, I'm sure.

"John had visited my relatives in Wales and England," she tells me and goes on, "relatives I had only written to but had never met. I didn't meet them until many years later. It was probably close to twenty years before I met them, and they met me with a different husband and two of our children. I had an opportunity a few years after John died to go to Wales with my mother. She wanted me to go with her and get married when I returned to Canada. I stayed home and married your dad."

I look at her and say, "I'm glad you did."

I look back now on that time my mom and I shared in my kitchen one Saturday afternoon. I look back on the sharing of the secret and the new understanding it brought for both of us. I think about my hesitation to show her the book. I was not sure what her reaction would be. I was concerned she would be upset. I was worried she would think I was prying. I hesitated to show her the book, but I couldn't wait. I told her about finding the book and my reaction when I read it.

"Mom, I was in a bookstore looking around one day, and I noticed this book. I don't know why I was drawn to it, but I picked it up and began to read part of it. I was disappointed to find that it seemed to contain only obituaries of the men and women who had died in the war. I went to set the book down again when the name 'John Morelli' went through my mind," I explain. "I don't know why."

My mom nods her head but doesn't comment.

I continue, "I wondered if John would be in this book. I slowly turned to the 'M's and there it was 'J.L. Morelli.' My heart was pounding, and I had a sense of being totally alone in the busy bookstore. I could hear voices, music in the background, and the hum of shoppers milling around, yet I felt like I was standing alone as I stared at his name. It was hard for me to understand that this was your first husband. I began to read the passage and I read that he was from Plunkett, your hometown. I don't know why, Mom, but I felt overwhelmed and almost panicky when I read that. I wanted to sit down, yet I couldn't stop reading until I read 'Morelli was married just before returning to England.' Then my eyes filled up and I couldn't read any further for a long time." I look at her and her eyes are full now too.

"I can't imagine what it must have been like for you; to be a newlywed at nineteen and find out that your husband is 'lost at sea,' never to return," I say quietly.

I stand there staring at the passage and looking at my mom. My eyes are misty and I am unable to focus. My chest feels tight and I feel such a sense of loss, loneliness and connectedness all at the same time. There is no picture of him in the book, but I can picture him on his wedding day with my mom. Should I tell my mom about the wedding picture?

The wedding picture is yet another secret.

My mom's best and lifelong friend, Kathy, gave me a wedding picture of John and my mom with the promise that I would not tell my mom. I said okay but again I wondered why the secret and Kathy attempted to explain. She seemed to understand my mom's need to keep the

secret, but she was unable to articulate it or help me understand. Kathy also understood that she was to remain a keeper of the secrets, but something was different that day.

My sister Rae and I had gone to visit Kathy while in Calgary. Kathy seemed very nostalgic that day, and as we sipped tea, she began reminiscing about growing up in Plunkett and all the experiences she and my mom had shared. She had many funny stories about catching gophers and selling their tails, or waiting for the train to come with the big barrel of ice cream, and about all the various characters that contributed to life in Plunkett. Both my mom and Kathy had lost their fathers at a young age, and my perception from hearing all their stories is that they had formed a very close bond the moment they met or as far back as they could remember. Listening to Kathy that day, I also got a sense of how important they were to each other's happiness, contentment and survival.

Rae and I were always curious about some of the things that happened to my mom while growing up because we had only heard little pieces of the stories, and we were always afraid to ask more in case it upset Mom. I felt safe to ask a few questions that day about other family secrets. My mom's older brother committed suicide when mom was quite young, and Rae and I had never heard any explanation of what happened or what it was all about. Kathy told us her recollection of that day, and things began to make a little more sense. The losses my mom endured, and how strong she had been, became so obvious that day.

My mom's father had died in a car accident when she was only nine years old, and her mom never got over it. Kathy said that my grandmother functioned well, worked outside the home, provided for her family, and was involved in the community, but she really struggled in her role as a parent after her husband died. I have heard bits of other stories and my sense is that

my grandmother may have been emotionally distant in many of her relationships. Perhaps it was a way of protecting herself. Parts of the stories I have heard my mom tell give me a sense that my mom and her brothers were very protective of my grandmother and never fought or disagreed in front of her. They never wanted to upset her and didn't get to be normal kids in that sense. I imagine that they never discussed the details or their feelings around these family losses. The message may have been clear that any talk or discussion would upset their mother, and as a result, all hurtful events became secrets.

As I reflect on these family secrets, I acquire some realization of how and why secrets developed in my mom's family. She never grew up with the experience of sharing and discussing grief. She never learned how, and perhaps I in turn didn't either. I keep things quiet, rather than sharing them with people who perhaps could support me. I believe I was socialized to keep those things a secret and perhaps that is part of the reason why it is so difficult to tell my own stories.

My reluctance to share personal parts of my life seems connected to my mom's reluctance to discuss things that were traumatic or hurtful and that perhaps reflected badly on her or her family. I have been quite reluctant or perhaps avoidant about even thinking about some of my own secrets. Perhaps my mom felt that digging up her past served no purpose or that all the loss and grief she experienced were better left behind. I have that same sense that perhaps my own traumas and secrets don't need to be shared. Perhaps they are better left alone, untouched and undisturbed. Perhaps the leaving behind is a form of dissociation and not wanting to remember the pain and not wanting to re-experience it. I wonder if that may be true for my mom – that in telling her secret stories she would relive the experience. If she told her stories and repeated the tellings, would it force her to experience and relive not only the pain but also the

story itself and would she then restory it in a different way? Does dissociating and leaving it behind to avoid the pain get in the way of developing an alternative perspective?

I can certainly relate to the experience of dissociation. It has happened to me at different times in my life, and I realize it has contributed to my keeping of secrets. Dissociation often allowed me to tolerate pain, to escape pain momentarily, to continue with life responsibilities and obligations, and more importantly, it allowed me to survive. However, I realize that dissociation is not always healthy. It may help me to survive, but it also helps me to avoid. Prolonged avoiding gets in the way of dealing with the issues, the trauma and the pain and leads to my secrets being kept. Dissociation as it relates to the keeping of secrets intrigues me.

When Jordan was in the accident, I wanted to separate from the emotional mom and be the rational nurse – but I couldn't. I was stuck in the role of mom because I could not leave that role. It seemed the most important role at the time. If I had been able to separate, it might have been more helpful to Jordan's well-being. I would have insisted on certain medical procedures and processes being done. But the emotional response to the accident was not only appropriate to have but also appropriate to share. So sharing my emotions was much easier and more acceptable than sharing my horror and response to Jordan's disclosure only 18 months earlier. I was able to share the details of the accident and my extreme emotional response and know that it was socially acceptable to do so. Instinctively, I knew the normative discourse allowed this type of sharing in the public domain.

However when Jordan disclosed, I involuntarily separated to another space in order to hear and respond to his disclosure because the lived emotional experience would have overcome my ability to respond appropriately and support him. I wonder now how my separation in the

moment contributed to my later “not telling” of this painful experience. Perhaps my dissociation created a space that got in the way of my telling. By the time I put the pieces together, I felt as if it was too late to tell.

Thinking about this experience, I continue to struggle with the “why” of information keeping and of holding my secrets. Now, in my present space, I want to recognize what holds me back from telling my secrets, and I want to understand my motivation when I do tell. Estes (1992) helps me understand this:

All women have personal stories . . . but there is one kind of story in particular, which has to do with a woman’s secrets, especially those associated with shame; these contain some of the most important stories a woman can give her time to unraveling. (p. 374)

I want to unravel, unpack, and explore secrets of mothering. I want to explore what those particular secrets are about and how they relate to feelings of guilt, incompetence, inadequacy, shame and blame. I want to understand the telling of secrets and the response the teller of secrets receives. Does this response impact future secret-keeping and secret-telling? How does the normative discourse surrounding mothering contribute to our secret-keeping and secret-telling?

Inevitably, if we are mothers, our secrets are related to the practice and discourse of mothering (O’Reilly, 2004a). How do mothers decide when and to whom to tell their secrets? When do we keep our stories private? What do we expect from the listener when we tell our own secrets? Are we afraid we will be seen as a “bad mother” if we tell the secrets that expose motherhood as being messy, complex, and challenging?

My mom didn't tell her secrets and according to the normative discourse of mothering she was a "good mom." Her husband and children adored her (still do). She was always at home when we needed her. She worked very hard but not outside the home. She put her children's needs before her own, and she very seldom showed emotions, such as anger and frustration, that are typically labeled as negative in the normative discourse of mothering. But I never learned what mothering was really about from her. I spent hours with her cooking, cleaning, gardening, and helping to look after my younger siblings. It always appeared to me that she was managing well, that she was happy, and that she enjoyed her lot in life. I had glimpses of the woman behind the serenity mask when she seemed tired or perhaps upset, but it was always only glimpses. I suppose, as a "good mother," she consciously did not disclose to me, her daughter, the struggles she was having. I wonder if she disclosed to anyone how she felt about the challenges she faced, such as feeding a harvest crew three meals a day plus lunches while she cared for five children, one of whom she was breastfeeding.

I never questioned my mom's life - what she did, if it made her happy. Yet, I wonder about that now. Friedan (1963) writes about the discrepancy between the reality of the lives of women of my mother's generation and the image they tried to conform to--the mismatch between expectations and experience. Susan Maushart (1999) contended that this problem still existed in 1999. She argued that mothers of the day had expectations of themselves as mothers that were not simply inaccurate or ill-informed but downright disabling and maybe even delusional. O'Reilly (2007) maintained that, although many authors who explore mothering are beginning to "tell it like it is," there remains a disconnect between what mothers expect of the experience of mothering and the reality of the experience.

Before my divorce, I was mothering three children with a frequently absent parenting partner. I had two jobs related to my nursing career, I maintained a large farmyard with a market garden and greenhouse for a period of time, and I also owned and operated a small inn at a nearby resort. It was crazy making, yet I would not have dreamed of crying out and telling anyone how hard it was to manage, how frustrated and alone I felt and how guilty I felt for not being a better mom. Why did I hold my secrets of mothering so close? Was I reluctant to confront the messiness of mothering and, in not doing so, did I deny that messiness? Did my silence perpetuate my secrets of mothering? Did it perpetuate the normative discourse of mothering?

If all of us as mothers shared our secrets, would we realize we are not alone? Would our sharing offer support to other mothers who have had, or are having, a similar experience? Would it challenge our feelings of guilt, frustration, and incompetence? Would it encourage others to speak and tell their secrets? Would it break the silence of mothering? I think about the mask I wore. Maushart (1999) indicates that the mask of motherhood “keeps women silent about what they feel and suspicious about what they know” (p. 2). As mothers, our experience is what we know. Our thoughts, our feelings, and our intuition are what we know. What we have to share is our stories.

Why are we, as mothers, so reluctant to share our stories? What are we afraid of? Are we afraid of being judged, labeled, shunned, or condemned? Perhaps we are afraid to admit that we feel like a “bad mother.” No one wants to admit to being a bad mother nor do we want to admit we had a bad mother. To be a bad mother or to have a bad mother is to be disturbed, defective or damaged in some way. I desperately want to be a good mother. And yet I realize, according to

the dominant and normative discourse of mothering, I am a bad mother, especially if I take off my mask and tell my secrets.

Maybe that is why I am so reluctant to sit in *the chair*...

The workshop continues and we go through a number of other exercises that move the group towards answering the question, "What would you tell if you had an opportunity to sit in the chair?" As we go around the room, people identify mostly professional issues they would be willing to talk about. I identify my struggle of choosing autoethnography as methodology for my dissertation. I explain to the group that when identifying my comfort with self-disclosure on a continuum (one of the other exercises we did in the workshop), I identified my comfort level just off centre of the continuum leaning towards the "not so comfortable" end, yet I am using autoethnography as methodology, which requires self-disclosure. I identify this dilemma and attempt to explain it to the group.

I wonder out loud to the group and to myself, "Is it a dilemma or a discrepancy of selves? A self that wants to share but a self that is afraid to share? Is it more about choosing to disclose, choosing to share the secretive, and choosing to let the personal become public in the hope that things may change?"

I still question why I am telling my story. Why do I feel this is an important story to tell? Why do I think it is a story that needs to be told? I remember reading Clandinin and Connelly (1994) and how they discussed the telling and retelling of stories as being reflexively related to

living and reliving a story and providing opportunities for growth, change, and resistance to our culture's canonical narratives.

I explain to the group that, "when I tell my story, I live the story and, when I retell the story, I relive the experience. I feel the emotions again in varying degrees of intensity, but with each telling, I see something new or understand things in a different or clearer way. I am wondering if others in the reading and rereading of my story will see or understand things in a different way."

I wonder to myself, "Will my story resonate with the group today and with my dissertation audience in the future? Will it cause them to pull forward their own stories and to retell them and relive them in new ways? Will it challenge them to change or resist some of their beliefs or the standard beliefs of society?" I am thinking about this and wondering what stories are worth telling and whose stories are worth telling and how do we determine worth when, suddenly, I am forced back into the moment. I hear the next question proposed to the group, and I wonder where all this is going. "What is the purpose of this workshop activity?" I wonder, "Is it getting someone ready for the chair?"

People in the group are now asked to identify whose story they would like to know more about. A process ensues and at the end of the process the majority of people pick my story. All I can think is, "Now what?"

Dr. Tomasulo asks someone to retrieve a piece of paper he has left on a table with something written on it. On the paper in large letters is one word: "Lee." People seem awestruck and many ask Dr. Tomasulo, "How did you know?"

I am not awestruck. I am terrified, or at the very least, spooked.

"Are you willing to do this? Are you okay with working with the process?" he inquires.

"I'm okay," I whisper. Trying somehow to lighten the mood, I smile weakly and say, "I have always thought I needed therapy, so maybe today is the day."

And so we begin. Everyone is seated in a circle and I am invited to stand with Dr. Tomasulo in the middle of the circle. I get up slowly and walk towards him. I can feel my heart pounding in my chest. He smiles, pauses and then asks, "Would you like to go for a walk?" I nod but hesitate. He puts his hands behind his back, lowers his head a bit and he begins to walk slowly around the inner circle.

I look at him and I wonder, "What am I doing here?" I force myself to take the first step. I make myself walk with him, and I feel the pieces of my story welling up inside me. I know at this moment that walking will bring out my story.

I have always walked and talked when I needed to tell someone a personal story, when I needed to talk, when I needed to let something go, when I needed to heal. I remember going for walks with my mom down the lane at our farm and being able to tell her the hard things to tell. I remember it being easier to tell and to talk when I walked.

And so we walk. As Dr. Tomasulo gently begins to ask me questions, I realize I need to tell the secret that brought me to autoethnography (a/e), possibly one of the biggest secrets ever kept but, oddly, often referred to as "our little secret." I need to tell about this secret so my struggles with a/e will make sense to the group and perhaps to myself.

I don't remember what I said exactly. It's a blur. The actual story was not disclosed but the feelings and experience were shared and others tried to relate to my experience as I eventually sat in Tomasulo's chair.

As I sit in the chair people take turns standing behind me, touching me on the shoulder and attempting to relate my thoughts and feelings as they interpret them and reflect them back. They speak in "I" statements and try to reflect what they think the experience may have been like from my perspective.

I am crying and someone brings me a tissue. I cry and talk through my tears. Some people are able to articulate exactly how I feel; others are close and still others not so close. It is a strange form of dissociation. I am very aware of myself sitting in the chair and telling my story. I am also aware of me watching me, wondering what is going through the minds of others at certain moments. So I have not separated to watch myself in the chair. Rather I am watching from the chair completely aware of where I am and what I am doing while part of me is analyzing the process and wondering about the audience. I find myself wanting

them to know it happened in a school and wanting them to know that the individual is still in the school system. I think most people are missing that-and maybe it is just as well-or maybe not.

As I sit in the chair, I talk about the separation of selves, the dissociation, about mothering, trying to protect, struggling, experiencing the pain, experiencing the powerlessness and helplessness, and most of all about the anguish of seeing my son's pain and knowing I failed to protect him. Someone reflects on my dissociation and my feelings of guilt for separating, but I correct the story and indicate that I don't feel guilty for that. If I hadn't separated, I would have been unable to care for Jordan the way I needed to. I explain that at the time it was life preserving and allowed me to do what I needed to do without falling completely apart. I feel no guilt for my dissociation, but my mother guilt of failing to protect my child remains overwhelming.

Dr. Tomasulo begins closure. I have related the emotions of the story as I relived it. The details of the story are not important in Interactive Behavioral Therapy (IBT). What is important is the group member to group member communication and connection. And we have done that. We have connected, and it has helped me to examine my story and see it from a different perspective. I have also begun to think about the value of wholeness, possibility and healing.

I return to my group chair now and people give me feedback and they discuss their reactions on what they heard and how they felt during the telling of my story. I sit and listen while I wipe my eyes and blow my nose, and I am convinced I have mascara smeared

all over my face. They are empathetic and appreciative of me telling my story. They say they are both touched and moved by the story. Many indicate that my story has brought forward one of their own stories, and they are able to relate at many different levels to the emotions I was feeling and describing. We talk of wholeness and bringing the separated selves together and how, with the uniting of selves, a sense of wholeness may be accomplished.

I think about the concept of not separating the mom from the researcher, the mom from the professor/the professional, and the mom from the nurse. What would that be like? Is that possible for me to achieve? Am I convinced it would be a good thing? Am I ready for that? What would it mean? How do I get there? Do I want to get there?

I am tired now, so very tired. I really don't have the energy to say anything and wouldn't know what to say anyway at this point. I feel exhausted and I am not sure I have the energy to separate from this and put the mask back on.

We break for lunch and I wonder if there will be a degree of awkwardness. Everyone is supportive. Someone identifies that they related so closely to what I was saying that they were unable to stand behind my chair and reflect my feelings because the emotion would have been overwhelming. There is no initial awkwardness but as time goes by we slowly become more disengaged and the focus shifts. I wonder again what they are thinking. Were their responses genuine, or were they based on their need to appear as effective group members delivering the appropriate response? Are they questioning and judging my behavior, both now and previously? Do they think I failed to protect my son? Do they think I neglected him? Do they think I betrayed my son with the telling? Do they think the secret should have stayed

private? Do they think I have not done enough to promote justice? Do they think I have done too much? Do they think I am a bad mother? Have I let my mask slip too far? Do they now know what lies behind the mask?

II

BEHIND THE MASK: GUILT AND DECEPTION

One of the things you will learn on the job (of mothering) is guilt. You may feel guilty about leaving your children for your work and guilty about leaving your work for your children. You will no doubt also feel guilty about feeling guilty. But try to remember that our society encourages mothers to cultivate guilt like a little flower garden, because nothing blocks the awareness and expression of legitimate anger as effectively as this all-consuming emotion.

Harriet Lerner (1998, p. 75)

The Too-Busy Mom/Then and Now

I feel like I have always been too busy with other things to be able to mother the way I want to and the way I think I should. I have been like many other mothers who fool themselves by getting caught in the *after* myth: “*After* I get the dishes done, *after* I get the laundry done, *after* I get a promotion, *after* I get the mortgage paid off, *after* I finish my education **then** I will mother the way I want to and feel I should. *After*, I will spend time with my children; I will be there when they need me; I will enjoy them and have fun with them.” It is a myth because *after* never seems to come. My children are now adults, and I am still too busy with my work and completing my education. It never seems to end. When I was so busy when my children were very young, I did believe that it might end some day. I believed that someday I would have time. I look back now on that time in my life and realize just how fast the treadmill was going, and I am surprised I did not spin off the back and crash.

The Married Mom “Down on the Farm”

I’m sure everyone saw me running around like a crazy and possessed woman. Some people said I worked too hard, but I was never sure what I should take from that comment. My

mom tried to help out, but we never discussed my frenzied existence. It seemed to be the accepted way things were on a farm. All the work and all the money were about the farm. I grew up on a farm knowing and thinking that the farm was the priority and any work off the farm was to subsidize the farm. Our present farm included cereal crops, a market garden, a greenhouse, a grain cleaning plant, a large farmyard to maintain, poultry, canning, cleaning and kids. My work off the farm included two nursing positions (acute care at the local hospital and home care in the surrounding community) and the complete operation and ownership of a small inn at a nearby resort, which included check-in, check-out and everything in between.

Mothering was in the spaces, in the margins and sometimes simultaneous with the work. I think my kids worked too hard, too. This again was part of living on a farm or so I thought and so I was led to believe. I grew up with the work ethic of the importance of the farm and the ultimate goal of getting the crop off. I carried on with that philosophy in my married life. That philosophy was occasionally challenged by people I thought just didn't understand.

I left home at 18 thinking I would never return. But fate and choices sometimes take us back to a place where we believe we belong but don't want to be. Women who grow up with alcoholic fathers swear they will never marry an alcoholic, but they often do. Similarly, I never wanted to, or thought I would, marry a farmer but I did. My husband was not a farmer when I met him, nor did he ever think he would be although he had grown up on a farm. However, an opportunity to farm arose just before we were married. The opportunity was in my hometown and was in partnership with my dad and brothers. I loved my nursing job in the city, and my prospective husband was not finished university. However, because of his desire to farm and my belief that you "stand by your man," we agreed to go back to the farm. However, I made

stipulations: we would give it three years, and if it didn't work out, we would return to the city and continue with the lives we had left behind. We would wait to have children until after that time period.

The first three years were a disaster. We lived in a shack with an outdoor "john"; we tried to cope with drought, hail, nasty insects and weeds. We weren't making any money, and it was my income from nursing that kept the farm going. After three years I was more than ready to leave. I just wanted to leave quietly in the night. I felt guilty for wanting to leave. I didn't want to tell anyone how badly I wanted to leave. My husband was the only one who knew of my wish to leave and the only one who knew how guilty I felt about my desires to "get the hell out." Guilt is a wonderful thing if you know how to work it, and so we stayed. I kept my feelings a secret, and the seeds of resentment were planted.

I brought three children into the frenzied existence of farm life. I grew up seeing my mom do it, so I knew what to do. Even though I didn't want it or like it, farm life was familiar and comfortable. I also had my mom nearby to coach me, support me, and assist me. I never talked to her or to anyone else about the difficulty of trying to do it all and wanting to be **only** a mother and a nurse. I worked very hard at keeping that secret mostly because of guilt but also because I thought I must have some type of flaw. I grew up on the farm saying I loved the farm, and I returned to the farm, after I left home, to visit during harvest because I loved that time of year on the farm.

I no longer loved it, but I didn't feel it was okay to say so. I played the role, attempted to smile through it, became a rural woman and a hockey wife, but none of it fit. I lost myself somewhere along the way and only found myself when I was mothering. However, I never could

find the time to mother the way I needed to in order to stay whole. And, most of all, I didn't know that I could quit everything except mothering and nursing and the world would not collapse. The weeds might have grown, the fruit may have rotted or dried up, and I may have disappointed my husband and my family, but regret would not have been such a big part of the memory of mothering during that time and place.

I kept that secret for a long time. I told no one. But did I intentionally conceal the fact that I was unhappy, or was I also deceiving myself? On one hand, I inherently knew I was unhappy, but I did not trust my own thoughts or feelings. Petrarch, as cited in Bok (1989), states that self-deception may be “the most deadly thing in life” (p. 59) and writes:

O race of mortal men, this it is above all makes me astonished and fearful for you,
when I behold you, of your own free will, clinging to your miseries; pretending that you
do not know the peril hanging over your heads, and if one brings it under your very eyes,
you try to thrust it from your sight and put it far off. (p. 59)

And so I clung to my miseries. I tried to ignore the unsettledness, the wariness, the shame and most of all the discontent. I told myself I was just ungrateful; I should be happy; I could be happy if only I tried harder. I tried to wear the happy mask, but I was only deceiving myself. I tried to push unhappiness out of my sight.

I don't think my intention was to deceive anyone else. To intentionally deceive would require awareness, and I had not recognized this discontent as real or acceptable. Freud (1960; 1963) speaks of false consciousness (lack of awareness of our hidden or unconscious feelings and thoughts) and defense mechanisms (unconscious denial of reality to avoid anxiety), and he maintains that our self-illusions stand in the way of becoming free: “Only through unmasking,

demystification, above all interpretation, can we break through the web of illusion and become aware of our role in perpetuating it” (Freud as cited in Bok, 1989, p. 60). I was not aware of this unconscious denial of my reality. I maintained an illusion of contentment and happiness and was unable to name the emptiness I felt. My deception, although unconscious to some degree, was getting in the way of me processing and making sense of my reality, my situation, and my circumstances.

However, Sigmund Freud also talks about defense mechanisms as a means of survival or protecting oneself from a truth we can not accept or can not face. And so we keep that truth a secret mostly from ourselves in the form of repressed knowledge. We are both inside and outside this experience. We hide something that we are not sure exists or perhaps we do not recognize as existing. Self-deception related to secrecy is confusing to our conscious and unconscious mind. How can we hide something that we are literally in the dark about?

Was I being deceiving or being deceived? Was my mask held in place by self-deception or fear? Which one kept the mask on most? Which one was responsible for my behavior? Which one kept me stuck?

I had a strong sense of my unhappiness, but I also blamed myself for that unhappiness. I felt unappreciative of my three wonderful children, my health, my family, my job and my friends. I repeatedly told myself I should be happy. There were many people less fortunate than me. It was shameful to be so self-centered and unappreciative. I should be able to think about all those good things and make myself happy and content. But how could I be happy all the time? Everyone has her “down days,” and since there were good times, I could always rationalize that I could/should be happier. I convinced myself it was a matter of willpower and attitude.

“Unhappy,” “sad” and “bored” were not part of our vocabulary as a family when I was growing up. I always felt guilty as a child and adolescent if I voiced those negative emotions. I never learned how to express those emotions, but I learned how to pretend they didn’t exist. There was never a conversation about feeling bad or sad, but there were conversations about why I should be happy. I learned how to deny those negative feelings and put on a happy face. I wore a mask, but I don’t remember putting it on. I didn’t think there was anyone to tell about how I felt without feeling some degree of shame or failure.


The farm work ethic I grew up with was getting in my way now. I truly believed that I needed to have a clean house with all the laundry done, the yard manicured, the garden weeded, three home-cooked meals a day prepared and my “other work” done, and I was supposed to enjoy it--embrace it. People would say, “How do you do it all?” I thought they were giving me a compliment. I took some pride in “doing it all” and the busyness kept me from consciously thinking about the discontent.

I didn’t realize until much later that the busyness served a purpose. It became part of the denial. If I could stay busy, I didn’t have time to think. I could go from one task to the next without stopping to recognize how I was feeling--without recognizing what was going on around me. When I was busy in my home, I could concentrate on that. When I was busy at the hospital, I could concentrate on that and when I was out in the garden; I could focus my energy on the task at hand. I was always completing one job so I could move onto the next. If I was busy enough, always planning for the next step, I wouldn’t let my mind wander; I wouldn’t have the time or energy to reflect on where I was in life and where I wanted to be.

I could put things in their separate little boxes and keep parts of my life separate from the rest. My outside life was very organized, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, planned to accomplish the many tasks in just the time allotted. When the unforeseen happened, it just meant frantic reorganization to establish equilibrium once again. If I could keep my outside life organized, I didn't have to look at the messiness on the inside and the looming discontent. Everyone around me looked happier than me, yet no one knew I was unhappy--and I sure wasn't going to tell.

Instinctively I knew I was unsettled. My intuition told me that something was not right. If I stopped long enough, I would get a glimpse of how I wished things could be. If I stopped long enough, I would try to satisfy my instincts and intuition and that scared me even more. What would happen if I did things differently? What would happen if I stopped doing things? What would the dangers and consequences be of following my intuition? I guess I needed to do something, but I didn't know what it was I needed to do. I also did not trust my intuition, and I was still convinced that I was being ungrateful--that wanting more or something different was betraying someone or something. But I still felt that I needed to be doing something different; I needed to be somewhere else.

I remember this time as fragments of memory, scattered and frenzied, always organizing time to make room to work. Room to work in the yard, the garden, the house, the hospital...never organizing time to spend with my kids away from the yard, the garden, the house, the hospital. The same fragments of memory keep flashing back.



I wind up the swing chair one more time and rush outside to do more hoeing and weeding. His head looks crinkled and I wonder if babies get stiff necks if they sleep with their head flopped to the side, but if I move his head he may wake up and I will not get the gardening done. He is only 6 months old.

She is so excited that we are going to the lake today. She knows we need to get the hoeing and weeding done first, and she is more than happy to help. First, it is the garden and then the trees and soon the day is fading away, and we never get to the lake. She is only 9 years old.

I see him through the greenhouse window reflected in the morning sun. He is playing in the sandbox with his toys and looks so sweet and innocent. I want to rush out to hug him and play with him. I just need to finish the transplanting, but then it is bedtime. His little brother will be born soon. He is only 5 years old.

I leave him at nursery school and he is crying as usual. "The Experts" have told me that it is good for children with special needs to go to school early and learn from their peers. I call my mom to see if she can pick him up later. I am on my way to a university class. "The Experts" say it will be good for me. He is only 4 years old.

She is upset and bewildered when her mom is so distraught. She tries to comfort me to make me happy. Nothing seems to work. She is only 12 years old.

They have built a snow fort and want me to go inside. How can I, as a mother, explain my extreme fear and claustrophobia to them? I get down on all fours and crawl through the small opening into the fort. I can't sit up; I can hardly breathe. But I stay and tell them how wonderful it all is. My heart is pounding at 150 beats per minute and they are worth every minute, every beat.

He has been practicing all day. I see only glimpses of him as he goes by the window on his little motorbike. He comes into the house and asks me to come out and watch him do a jump. He revs his motor and approaches his homemade ramp. I hold my breath and at the last moment he lets off the throttle and plunges head first into the dirt. He cries and I console him. How do I tell him that life is about knowing when to let off the throttle and when to take a risk? I wish I could tell him the difference. He is only 10 years old.

He tells me he wants to go into politics. I support him, and I diligently work the campaign trail. He is successful; he is an MLA. He is a rookie but is appointed agriculture critic in the opposition. We will leave the farm and go to the city as a family. "The Experts" say it is better to stay living in the constituency to maintain a presence. He leaves and we

stay. Quilt is a wonderful thing if you know how to use it. "Stand by your man!" I am only 35 years old.

Someone tells me my husband has many addictions. I have barely acknowledged even one, and another woman never entered my mind. It is time to leave. I am already 41 years old.

He loves his dog. Charlie was named after the nickname we gave his brother in utero. We can't take the dog to the city. "Why not?" he pleads. He is only 11 years old.

I was 41 years old with three children and without a husband. I was soon to be divorced and a single mom although I had felt like a single mom for many years already, particularly since politics had entered our family's life. I had many decisions to make. I received advice from many who encouraged me to keep going, hang in there, and rely upon the support around me. I decided I would follow my intuition, as frightening as that might be, and move to the city and go back to university. Most of my friends and family did not agree with that decision. I tried to make them understand and, although I questioned my decision on many occasions, I saw this as my chance to leave. I had no reason to stay. Holding on to my resolve and trusting in my intuition, I moved forward. In moving forward came the realization that my secret was gradually seeping out.

How could I defend my decision without letting out my secret? Everyone would realize I was unhappy, I was discontented, and I wanted to leave. I questioned whether I was ready to do

what I needed to do and whether I would have done what I needed to do if I had not found out about my husband's secret? His secret was out and so was mine. He was living a double life and so was I. It was time to end the charade, but would I be able to do that? Would I be able to incorporate this experience as a part of who I was? Would it become part of my identity? Would the experience and those years of my life shape my identity, or would I keep it separate and try to deny it? And would I learn from it?

I wonder about that now, 17 years later: did I learn from the experience of being too busy because I am still busy, and I still feel guilty for not spending more time with those I love. I have entered academia, and I struggle with the demands of a faculty position and the demands of mothering.

The Academic Mom

Raising a child takes 20 years (or more) not one semester.

Robert Drago & Joan Williams (2000, p. 48)

Is there any other mother who is as negligent, distracted, frazzled, hurried and harried as the academic mother? I have heard it said that an academic career carries with it a degree of flexibility that is conducive to mothering. And it is true: the university doesn't care whether I work myself to death at home or at the office as long as I produce and prosper. Processes of tenure, promotion and merit create an environment of competition--a race against the clock to meet or exceed a set of standards, a race against colleagues to earn a higher place in the rankings and thus a better chance for merit.

The moment I accepted my tenure-track position, my clock for tenure started ticking and I didn't dare stop producing or prospering until I got it! Promotion was next; there was always one more rung in the ladder to climb. As I climbed this ladder with children, a partner, friends, family and an aging parent hanging on to me--sometimes supporting me, sometimes clinging to me--I tried to keep my balance so the ladder didn't topple over. But I could not climb down the ladder to stable ground because crawling down the ladder was to quit; to give up and not be meritorious; not be tenured; and not be promoted. So I hung on and I continued to struggle up the ladder. I kept my struggles a secret. I tried to make it look like it was doable. I complained sometimes, but no one listened so I projected an image of being a capable, intelligent, competitive, composed and competent woman who could do it all. I struggled to be both a good mother and a good academic.

I am sitting in my hot stuffy office at work, and it is a beautiful day outside. I long to be outside in the sunshine and feel its warmth. I fight the urge to turn off the computer and run. I look around at the pile of papers scattered around the room, and I wish someone would come and sort them all out for me. Should I work on my community development project, or should I finish preparing for the new course I am teaching in the fall? Should I get this all out of the way and then work on my dissertation? I FEEL PANICKY! How will I get this all accomplished? I am frustrated, and I am disappointed in myself, and I am angry about the demands of this academic position. I want to leave it behind right now. I want to isolate myself and write.

If I don't finish my dissertation this summer, I will be working on it next summer too. Once the semester begins in the fall, it will be very difficult to find space to write. It is difficult enough to find that space now. I want space, yet I want people! I need to isolate, but I don't really want to isolate. I want to isolate, but I don't want to miss anything. It's summer and I want to spend time with my kids, my partner, my mom and my family and friends. And I can't disappear. Jordan is independent but not that independent. I try to sort this out. If I had an opportunity to disappear from the rest of my life and just write, would I regret the time not spent with those I love? Of course. If I don't disappear and write only in fits and starts and spend time with my friends and family, will I regret not writing more this summer? Of course not. I am wasting time trying to sort this out. I want to stand up and holler out the window, "I can't climb this ladder anymore; I am losing my balance!" But I sit in silence. At this point I have no energy to holler; I have nothing left to give.



It appears that, in order to cope with the demands of both academic life and family life, women make the choice to either reduce their work hours or limit their careers (Becker & Moen, 1999). I am 58 years old and still completing my PhD. Does that say anything about limiting a career in academia? The academic work model usually includes a 60-hour work week, travel, concentrated work time, and discouragement of family life (Mason & Goulden, 2002). University settings have been known to be "hostile" and "toxic" (Fothergill & Feltey, 2003, p. 9), and "chilly" (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Williams, 2002) towards women especially mothers. The pre-tenure years are notably filled with anxiety and stress.

I tried to mother during those first five years on a tenure track and I felt pressured, exhausted, and a failure at both endeavors. Trying to do it all was a recipe for failure, or at the very least, some form of disaster or crazy making. Mothering encompasses a million things, and so does academia. As mothers in academia, we don't often silence academia, but we often "hide the baby" (Walden, 2002) and with that comes a feeling of failure and guilt. We are reluctant to talk about our struggles to do it all, to cope, and to still look good with at least half of our hair in place and our teeth brushed. Fothergill & Feltey (2003) identify a dilemma for mothers in academia: "We want to excel in both realms [mothering and academia] but there is no structural support for those goals" (p. 228). As a consequence, there are more women pursuing a PhD but fewer women pursuing tenure track positions" (Fothergill & Feltey), and women are still a minority in the full professor world.

Promotion to full professor is the next step for me, but I often contemplate not bothering. My colleagues encourage me to set my sights on the full professor gold ring to improve my salary and pension. I understand their point, but the climb, the hoops, the CV building, the grant writing, the publishing, the research, the community development and project expansion all seem quite onerous and overwhelming at the moment. And an interruption to all this is the continuous onslaught of meetings, meetings and more meetings.

This room is too small. We can hardly move in here any more. Our faculty has outgrown this room and, as we attempt a discussion, we all crane our necks and yell at the speakers hanging from the ceiling as we try to telecommunicate with our faculty in other locations. We look like a bunch of ostriches trying to project our voices up to the speakers and,

because of this, we never look at each other when we speak. We have many meetings in this room: faculty meetings, curriculum meetings, tenure meetings, promotion meetings, merit meetings, course meetings, year meetings, and committee meetings to name just a few. Today is a faculty meeting to discuss the standards for tenure and promotion.

The standards for tenure and promotion are cherished like a bible of sorts, and so it is very important to be clear about what the standards indicate if you are part of the meetings to discuss possible changes to the standards. Most of the discussion is "to ponder points," the number of points that should be delegated to each accomplishment: Is a chapter worth as many points as an article? What distinguishes an invited paper? How many points for each research dollar awarded? Are Tri-Council dollars worth more than community dollars? Is clinical practice worth the same number of points as research? How do we measure that?

The room always seems split between the research faculty and the clinical practice faculty, and this is the frustrating part. I squirm in my chair, and I try to stay in the moment. "Why does it always come down to this?" I wonder, "Our clinical practice does involve research, and vice versa. Are they not both worthy in their own right? They take a different approach, but both are done with purpose, conviction and devotion. Why do we even attempt to measure the difference? And how many points is good teaching worth? It seems worthy only if you receive an award for teaching." I shake my head and I wonder, "How can we get away from this type of discussion? A faculty position requires all these pieces. We play multiple roles--intersecting, intertwining and complementary roles. Our practice informs our research and teaching. Our research informs our practice and teaching. And our

teaching informs and connects with both our research and our practice. We are multiple selves in each of these roles as well. We are more than faculty members during each moment that we sit here or anywhere else. Our discussion is influenced by this complexity and messiness."

Maybe it would be easier if I could sit here as an academic and only an academic, but my mom is at my home right now and Jordan is staying with her. She has not been feeling well and has come into the city to attend some doctors' appointments and have further tests. I felt terrible leaving her this morning. I wanted to stay with her, but she reassured me she would be fine until I came home. I have been worried about her for a long time, and I wish I had more time to spend with her. I am sitting here thinking about the test she has booked for this afternoon. I am thinking about how I am going to get Jordan to work and still get to my mom's appointment. I still have a number of things I need to complete in my office after this meeting and I have a number of student emails to respond to as well.

I fidget in my chair and I feel irritated and distracted. I also feel like I am not contributing enough to the conversation and discussion, but I have a short neck and I can't compete with the other ostriches. I feel so guilty for being here, but if I had stayed home with my mom, I would have felt guilty for missing this meeting. I feel some obligation to contribute to the discussion and to support my colleagues who also are trying to move away from this competitive approach to tenure, promotion and merit. This scrutinizing seems so tedious and laborious at times. We seem to forget that we are all individuals with individual goals and aspirations and we are also multiple selves. We are, more accurately, forced to forget because it is not professional or acceptable to talk about our multiple selves and to take

our circumstances into consideration. And this holds true for many reasons, and many good reasons I suppose, but the impersonalization seems extreme and demoralizing, and I need to go home to see my mom and make sure she is okay.

The discussion about motherhood and employment has been around for a while but, more recent is the discussion that college-educated women should be able to have it all. However, professional women have been largely unsuccessful in their attempts to wed motherhood with a career (Crittenden, 2001). As academic mothers, we talk about our children at my workplace in terms of what and how they are doing, but we rarely talk about the juggling act of mothering and academia and what we could do about it. Studies have shown that few college-educated women have managed to achieve both motherhood and a career; high achieving women either have a hard time combining career and family or are childless, and those who have attained a senior level in their profession are likely to be childless (Crittenden, 2001; Hewlett, 2002). Compared to other professionals, female academics have the highest rate of childlessness (Hewlett, 2002). Studies have shown that, although marriage and family have a positive effect on the academic careers of men, they have a negative effect on the academic careers of women (Simeone, 1987).

Many faculty members in my college of nursing are entering the grandmother age and appear to have managed. I hear stories about where their children are living, what their occupation is and their level of education, but I hear little about the years the mothers spent in academia while raising children. Do they have regrets about missing important times with their children? Do they have regrets about not achieving tenure and promotion sooner? Do they have

regrets about not furthering their education? Do they have regrets that they were so driven to get merit, tenure and promotion that they missed out on things at home?

If it is difficult for a married woman, particularly a married woman with children, to succeed in academia, imagine what it is like for a single mother with children. I agree with Juffer (2007) in that the pressure in academia to show self-sufficiency as a single mom is intense. Juffer also states that single mothers are “domestic intellectuals” and the “new darlings of popular culture” and the media, but the legal system and medical field still assume that heterosexual couples make the best parents. For single mothers, to prove and govern themselves depends on their ability to be totally independent (Juffer). As a result, my acceptance in academia is based on autonomy. Autonomy grants me respect. However, I don’t feel like a “new darling,” and I often don’t feel very autonomous. But I do feel the pressure to achieve, to be independent and self-sufficient, and most of all to appear to be happy and successful. That is the hardest part.

It is also difficult to separate my single motherhood from my academic selfhood. How do I move between worlds and still maintain my identity in a less fragmented way? How do I give value to the work of mothering as I move from home, to classroom, to library, to grocery store, to faculty meeting, to research project and clinical practice, and to the gym (Juffer, 2007)? How do I proceed to speak frankly about my own personal experience and to connect life and work? The more I read, the more I think; and the more I know, the more I realize how difficult it is to combine mothering and academia and how important it is to “tell it like it is” instead of pretending that I/we can do it all.

Mothering work may not be recognized in academia as worthy work and quite often single mothers do not feel part of the academic community (Juffer, 2007). However, as a single

mom in academia, I do feel that some of my colleagues recognize my added parenting and financial responsibilities. Still, it is important to be seen as self-sufficient.

I am not sure what I was thinking or what I expected when I entered this job. Did I really believe that I could climb the ultimate ladder of tenure, promotion and merit, teach, publish, have a clinical practice and still survive, still be a mother, still maintain a relationship? What was I thinking? I guess I wasn't thinking because I have now added to the mix, the pursuit of a doctorate.

Those of us who have challenging "outside" responsibilities are seen as disadvantaged and lacking the time and energy to do the proper CV building of a rising academic. I am particularly challenged because I am raising my children alone and my youngest child has special needs. These are my circumstances. However, my circumstances do not affect me as much as the response to my circumstances. In fact, "these challenges are minor when compared to the effect of the academic culture of doubt" (Atkinson, 2003, p. 31). This is a culture that simultaneously insists on and ignores all these "circumstances" and in so doing creates a veritable minefield that makes lifting a ton of feathers look almost like a reasonable task" (p. 31).

On one hand, those who know about my circumstances comment that I am doing well "considering the circumstances" and those who don't know, or don't care, about my circumstances compare me to those who have no children or those who have a partner to help and assist them. But if I talk of the circumstances, it is unprofessional and it puts more doubt in people's minds as to whether I am really able to perform in academia at all (Atkinson, 2003). And when I do succeed, quite often people are suspicious of what special assistance I may have

needed to accomplish such a feat. So I have either succeeded “in spite of” or “because of” my circumstances.

It is probably important to talk about and share my secrets and struggles in order to come out from under the circumstances of my mothering life identity and be able to integrate it with my academic life identity, but that is difficult because I am not sure what the consequences will be. I am also not sure how to do that. How can I blur the boundaries between work and home, public and private? How do I bring my mothering to work in the same way I already take my work home? I have already brought my mothering into the classroom to some degree. I teach an individual and group counseling course in which we discuss the application of counseling theory to practice, and I sometimes talk about communication patterns related to families, using my own family and my kids as examples. It not only serves the purpose of having real life examples but also makes me more “real” in the eyes of my students. It makes me a person, a mother, a daughter--not only a professor.

The most “real” I needed to be was when I did a guest lecture for a colleague, and my daughter Eve was in the class. I have never been so nervous teaching a class. It made me realize just how much I do wear a mask at the front of the classroom. My students only know as much about me as I choose to tell them. But . . .

... here I stand, on this particular day, at the front of a class, with no mask on. I am very careful about what I say and Eve still challenges me, and she is right. That is the infuriating part. She probably didn't challenge me to discredit me or to show me up or to impress her friends. She simply disagreed with what I was saying. I would have been so proud of her if

she had done that to another professor. But I'm her mother; she should respect and listen to me. Mother knows best after all. Fortunately, however, Eve was not raised to keep her mouth shut when she disagrees. She has learned how to respectfully disagree and also how to assert herself and she is seldom, if ever, intimidated. She has challenged me and supported me for the past thirty years. Why would she suddenly stop today? She comes up to the front after class with her friends, and they share their appreciation of the lecture.

Eve says, "You seemed nervous."

I think to myself, "I was definitely nervous without my mask," but I just smile at her and say, "It may have something to do with you being in the audience."

She smiles and says, "I thought so. Do you have time for lunch?"

We walk out of the classroom together and I am so proud she has decided to be a nurse, but I am even more proud of the woman she has become.



When I read Susan Maushart's (1999) work and her discussion of a juggled life, I read a part that reminds me of Eve. She is a generation X woman and maybe even a generation Y. Her self-esteem is high . . . and her goals even higher. [She has] attitude [and is] secure in her rights and privileges . . . and the term feminism itself seems quaint or redundant to her. [She doesn't] need to "make an issue of gender." [Feminism for her] is not accrued earnings but inherited wealth. And perhaps not coincidentally, [she has not] had children. (p.175)

So far at least, I am still hoping for grandchildren.

I can't help but wonder if my struggles and my juggling act to reach my goals and mother at the same time have scared her off somehow. Balancing my studies, my career and family life was, and continues to be, hard work. I would like to tell her that motherhood will not slam the door shut on her goals and possible opportunities, but I know it may narrow or restrict the open door. Nonetheless, it may surprise her. It may be different than she anticipates. I don't know. I can not decide if I have told her too much about mothering or not enough.

I also think about my students, who are mostly women, and I wonder how many are mothers. I wonder how many have put motherhood on hold until a better time. I wonder what their perceptions are of mothering. I wonder if they realize that mothers and non-mothers inhabit very different worlds. Maybe we need to talk about that.

I was both a mother and a professor when Eve was in class that day, and it was obvious to most people there. It may have been because she got something (probably money) out of my purse at the break. Perhaps that realness is a good thing. I think we as professors carry around a bit of phoniness that may or may not be useful for our students. We appear all-knowing, capable, organized, educated, confident and perhaps intimidating at times. How can we blur this boundary between what we know and feel on the inside and what shows on the outside and still maintain the professionalism that we think is important? Or do we need to re-define professionalism? Do we need to create a new or different image and discourse for academia? Is part of being real with our students also part of being real with each other and blurring the boundaries between public and private, between work and home?

Our struggle to create balance is not just combining mothering with work. It is also the integration of mothering with relationships, leisure, creativity, writing, exercise and even sleep

(Buskins, 2004). How can we create balance in academia that makes room for mothering and other aspects of our lives? I have learned very important things from the single mother part of my identity, many of which can be seen as an asset to academic life: problem solving, conflict resolution, decision making, critical thinking, integration of thought and behavior, time management, patience, understanding, teaching, an awakening to intuition and curiousness and, most of all, balance. With Jordan as my guide and day planner, I have balance whether I am in the mood for it or not.

I am down in my office a.k.a. "the dungeon." I seem to be making some progress on my dissertation; there is a knock on my door. I'm frustrated because everyone knows not to bug me when the door is shut (unless it is an emergency). It's Jordan again.

"Time for American Idol," he says casually.

"Shut the door, I'm busy," I insist.

"Come on" he coaxes, "I know I can beat you."

"No you can't," I challenge.

He plugs in the Wii game. I belt out Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On." I get a perfect score. The judges love me. Jordan can't believe it and neither can I. Jordan's mouth is still hanging open as I head back to the dungeon.

I am on a roll and my writing is going well...things seem to be coming together and the phone rings. Damn! It's Jordan; he needs a ride home from work because it is raining. I

feel like telling him to jump on his bike, ride fast and he won't get wet. I tell him I'll be right there. I walk outside to my car, and I notice something on the ground around my front wheel. It looks like metal rods or something and I wonder what it is. Where did this come from? I look around like maybe someone will have an answer for me. I look at it again and I can't figure this out. I bend over to look at it closer and see a label that says, "Do not try to remove. Do not try to move your car. Doing so could cause damage." What is this? What is going on?

Now I notice something shoved in the door of my car. It says the same thing, but there is also a number to call. I am still confused as a car pulls into my driveway. There are two guys in the car. One tries to be helpful and explain what is going on, and the other tells me how lucky I am that they haven't already towed my car away. It appears that they had intended to tow my car away earlier but had gotten busy. It also becomes apparent that they planned to tow my car away without even ringing the doorbell or calling to let me know what was going on. They say I have outstanding parking tickets, and I argue that I know I don't. I ask them to please show me evidence of these tickets. They pull some papers out and the license number is not mine. They don't seem to care. They ask me if another car is registered in my name. I say no and they keep telling me if I don't pay the tickets immediately they will tow away my car.

I ask them the dates of the tickets, and I suddenly realize that the license number is that of my daughter. I have to pick up Jordan and my only option is to go online and pay the tickets or have my car towed away and impounded. It is a good thing Eve can't hear me curse

her. I go online and pay the \$360.00 worth of tickets and leave her a grouchy message about what has happened. She calls me back in a while and she is sick. She is showing symptoms of Norwalk virus, and she has been in contact with someone who was just diagnosed with it. Now I can't even get mad at her!

The helpful guys reappear and take the boot off my car. They seem disappointed they can't tow it away. I pick up Jordan and he wonders why I'm late. I explain to him what happened, and he thinks it's cool and even cooler that Eve is in trouble. Back to the dungeon.

I'm staring at the computer screen and hoping my staring will make some words magically appear on the screen. Jordan is at work, so I have a few hours to write in a quiet and peaceful house but the words won't come. I hear the phone ring. What now! It's McLeay and he is wondering if he and his fiancée, Jamie, can come over for supper and discuss some details about their upcoming wedding. He says Jamie's parents would like to come too and he suggests we order takeout. Sure why not? They bring a bottle of wine, we have a great evening and I don't remember where the dungeon is any more.

Although "the sanctity of academia does not merge well with the sanctity of motherhood... [quite often] our development as academics [has] been directed by our mother selves" (Castle & Woloshyn, 2003, p. 35). Both Castle and Woloshyn identify how the mothering dimension of their lives directed their development as academics and their conceptions of themselves as scholars. My work in academia is focused on interprofessional

community development and health promotion and abuse prevention programs for adolescents with developmental disabilities. Is it possible to integrate my multiple selves including my academic self and my mother self in my community work and research? Can those identities be integrated, and can they be valued equally within the academic culture? Does mothering shape, define, and contribute to my scholarship?

My hours and hours of community development and program promotion are not that impressive on paper, and they are not that useful for CV building or successful grant applications, but that is what I do and that is what I am passionate about and that is what connects my academic self with my mother self. I understand now that is okay; it fits for me. My role of mother directs and supports the nurturing and care giving aspect of this work. And my success with collaborative work in schools is very much related and directed by my connectedness with my own children. Umansky (1996) described the mother-child relationship as the actualized ideal of community. What better way than mothering to teach me how to connect, relate and cooperate?

Writing is also an important part of my work and the integration of mothering and writing can also be a challenge. However, I am writing about mothering, so they do fuse together in a rather complex and messy text at times. Le Guin (2001) reflects on mothering and writing:

Writers who are mothers haven't talked much about their motherhood--for fear of boasting? For fear of being trapped in the Mom trap, discounted? Nor have they talked much about their writing as in any way connected with their parenting, since the heroic myth demands that the two jobs be considered utterly opposed and mutually destructive. (p. 174)

Emily Jeremiah (2004) recognizes this opposition between maternity and creativity; woman and writer; motherhood and authorhood; babies and books. She also challenges the normative discourse that sees authorship and subjectivity as opposed. For me, writing, in particular autoethnographical writing, is based on relationship, relationality, ethics, mutuality, subjectivity, and reciprocity, and in that way, writing is very much like mothering. Jeremiah (2004) contends that mothering is not only compatible with writing (art) but also conducive to it. Writing supports mothering, and mothering supports writing. Virginia Woolf (1929) advocated for *A Room of One's Own* as she recognized that women need space and money to be able to write. I agree with both statements. Mothering does support my writing, and vice versa, and I do need a room of my own.



Some days I feel like I may be making the final laps towards completion of this dissertation, and I sit here reading and pondering what I have written. I have thoughts and musings of Jordan, which always spark my creativity. I am deep in thought when suddenly the door on the room of my own (the dungeon) comes flying open. It's Jordan. He just stands there and smiles at me.

"What's up?" I ask.

"Not much," he replies.

"What do you want Jordan?" I impatiently ask.

"Nothing much," he responds still smiling.

"Jordan, I have told you before unless it is urgent, or you really need me, you need to wait until I come out of the dungeon rather than coming in when I'm busy. You know that," I try to explain without losing my train of thought and some remembrance of what I was about to write. I am getting old; I can't remember for very long.

He peers at me and simply says, "There's no sign on the door."

I burst out laughing, and I think I may have insulted him because he wasn't really intending to be funny, but I think to myself, "While mothering may inspire creative expression it may, at the same time, inhibit the expression of this creativity (Jeremiah, 2004), whether one has a room of one's own or not."

He must really be bored. It is time to call his siblings to see if he can hang out with them for awhile. I need to remain in this room of my own and, at the same time, not feel too guilty about doing that.

Is it possible to be a good mother and a good writer? Is it possible to be a good mother and a good academic? Is it possible to be a good enough mother and a good enough faculty member, or is it never good enough when it comes to mothering and academia? The dominant discourse of mothering is very similar to the dominant discourse of academia. Both require an unrealistic time commitment. One requires we put our children's needs before our own, and the other requires we put the needs of the academy before our own. Teaching, grant writing, research and publishing should come first and foremost. And the discourses of both expect that we do it all, and we do it well. How can we possibility combine the expectations of the normative discourses of mothering and of academia? The dominant discourses of both are often insistent

upon perfection and goodness. How can we do both? Is it possible to re-define and recreate the discourse? Where did this discourse come from?

III

DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF MOTHERING

Of course a mother's feelings are too deep for words. How sad it would be, if they were not.
Ivy Compton-Burnett (in Gullette, 2004, p. 175)

I have read a number of authors (Badinter, 1980; Dally, 1982; Thurer, 1994) who describe the good mother as a full-time stay at home mom, an archetype that came about due to the industrialization that separated work at home from productive work outside the home. The Victorian period following industrialization saw motherhood as pure, pious and moral. Following World War II, the good mother was again the stay at home mom and motherhood continued to have at its core an oppressive patriarchal institution (O'Reilly, 2004b). As time evolved, more and more mothers began to work outside the home for various reasons. Stay at home moms looked disapprovingly at working mothers who chose to leave their children to pursue their own careers. And working mothers looked at stay at home moms disapprovingly for smothering their children and being too unmotivated to work or too dependent on their partner. This appears to reflect today's culture of mothering as well. It has become somewhat "cool" again to be a stay at home mom (when possible) but not entirely. There is still some skepticism around the stay at home mom, coming primarily from working moms. Unfortunately, the resulting guilt and anger has not promoted the cause of empowered mothering. These dichotomies have always seemed to separate mothers rather than connect them.

I have read Andrea O'Reilly's work in my attempt to make sense of the discourse and practice of mothering. O'Reilly (2004a) explores and examines motherhood both as it is lived and as it is represented: motherhood as practice and as discourse. O'Reilly chooses the term

discourse over ideology “to highlight how the normative ideology of motherhood is *constructed* by various social texts – film, popular fiction, children’s fiction, magazines, judicial rulings, and parent books” (p. 13). I would agree that the discourse is constructed from various social texts.

I stand at the grocery checkout this week and take note of the magazines that portray the woman and mother I should be. I flip through the magazines as I wait and I realize that I am fat, lazy, disorganized, out of shape, grouchy and a lousy nutritional cook. As I compare what I am buying with what I should be buying, I hand Jordan the chips and dip and instruct him to put them back on the shelf. He defiantly says “No” and puts them back with the other groceries. I leave them there; chips and dip are his soul food and macaroni and cheese are mine. I will ride my bike to get groceries, bring my recycled grocery bags and buy more nutritious food...next week.

I also think the discourse is created by the messages I hear from significant people in my life, particularly other mothers. I internalize these messages especially if my relationship with that person is significant. As mothers, we listen to our mothers, our sisters, our aunts, our friends and even our daughters. We listen and compare and we strive to be a good mother according to the messages that surround us. We are reluctant to tell what we are thinking and what we are really doing. We hide our practice of mothering if it does not fit with the normative discourse.

O’Reilly (2004 a) chooses the term practice over experience “to emphasize...that mothering is specifically a practice” (p. 13). Sarah Ruddick defines practice as the “collective human activities distinguished by the aims that identify them and by the consequent demands

made on the practitioners committed to those aims” (Ruddick, 1989, pp. 13-14). However, the socially constructed texts do not fit with the aims, demands and activities of mothering. The expectations do not fit with the experience. How then does the discourse of mothering affect the practice of mothering? What does the dominant discourse say about mothering and the expectations for the practice of mothering?

Discourse of Mothering

Mothering is probably one of the most important jobs I will ever do, yet I began with very little knowledge, education, experience, training, understanding or insight regarding the job description, the requirements, the time commitment, the emotional commitment, the evaluation criteria, the vision, the goals and objectives (both short and long term), or the expected outcomes. Despite all this, I am expected to do a good job, in fact a very good job. The expectations are very clear now; I see them wherever I look.

The normative discourse of good mothering is everywhere: movies, magazines, newspapers, T.V., books (novels and otherwise), other mothers, fathers, grandparents, in-laws, friends, family, neighbours, and even children (those who belong to us and those who don't). As a good mother, I am expected to be devoted to my children (at all times), selfless, full of energy, always happy, content, satisfied and grateful to be a mother. I am expected to seek and heed expert advice, to deny any negative emotions I may have, and to always put the needs of my children first.

This dominant discourse of motherhood has been termed “sacrificial motherhood” (O'Reilly, 2004c) or “intensive mothering” (Hayes, 1996). Others expect me to be sacrificial and intense about my mothering, and unfortunately I expect it of myself. O'Reilly (2004c)

characterizes “sacrificial motherhood by six interconnecting themes:

1) children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother; 2) this mothering must be provided 24/7; 3) the mother must always put children’s needs before her own; 4) mothers must turn to the experts for instruction; 5) the mother is fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed and composed in motherhood; and finally 6) mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children. (p.11)

Inherently, I knew these expectations. I don’t remember anyone sitting me down and explaining them to me, but I always knew. No wonder I feel like such a failure. I can’t meet these expectations - especially the composure and the excessive energy, time, and money.

Intensive mothering according to Hayes (1996) is defined by three themes: “First the mother is the central caregiver: second, such mothering requires lavishing copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources on the child; and finally the mother regards mothering as more important than her paid work” (p. 8). Hayes also indicates that the ideology of intensive mothering is constructed “as child-centered, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive and financially expensive” (p. 8). But no one told me that to be a good mother all the time would be physically and emotionally exhausting.

Chase and Rogers (2001) describe the ideal of the good mother:

Above all, she is selfless. Her children come before herself and any other need or person or commitment, no matter what. She loves her children unconditionally yet she is careful not to smother them with love and her own needs. She follows the advice of doctors and other experts and she educates herself about child

development. She is ever present in her children's lives when they are young, and when they get older she is home everyday to greet them as they return from school. If she works outside the home, she arranges her job around her children so she can be there for them as much as possible, certainly whenever they are sick or unhappy. The good mother's success is reflected in her children's behaviour – they are well mannered and respectful to others; at the same time they have a strong sense of independence and self-esteem. They grow up to be productive citizens. (p. 30)

That is a tall order, yet I believe, from my perspective as a daughter, that my mom actually pulled this “ideal” good mother off or very close to it. I am sure she wore a mask as well, but I never noticed the cracks. However, as a mother myself, I never could quite get it together. Some days I did quite well; other days I slid off the path of good mothering. I didn't simply take a detour; I actually went in the ditch. I was not completely familiar with the literature related to mothering until recently, yet when I was a mother with young children I was acutely aware that I was supposed to be engaged in intensive and sacrificial mothering. I knew what the expectation of mothering was without anyone spelling it out to me. I felt guilty for working outside the home as a nurse, a gardener and an innkeeper, and I felt guilty when I didn't get the outside work done.

I tried to be domestic and, although I could cook quite well, I could not bake or sew but not from lack of trying. I attempted to make Eve a little “Holly Hobby” dress complete with a boat collar, yoke and pleats, but by the time it was finished she had outgrown it by at least two sizes. And my poor children had the most pathetic Halloween costumes in the community. I guess I didn't realize that wrapping a kid up in tinfoil to be a robot meant she still had to bend her knees and elbows. Or perhaps I could have used Erma Bombeck's (1991) technique of

putting paper bags over her kids' heads and instructing them to tell people their mom was having surgery.

If my kids were misbehaving, I thought it was my fault. If they were not doing well in school, I felt like a bad mother. If I was tired and grouchy, I felt guilty and if I was angry, I felt ashamed. I knew exactly how I was supposed to be and I felt I had failed miserably. The normative discourse of mothering fit very well with the normative discourse of a farm wife during that time as they both required sacrifice and intensity.

Rich (1986), O'Reilly (2004b) and Umansky (1996) all make the connection between the dominant discourse and the influence of patriarchy. And they identify motherhood as a patriarchal institution. Adrienne Rich, in her groundbreaking book entitled *Of Woman Born*, makes the distinction between the "potential *relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction--and to children, and the *institution*--which aims at ensuring that that potential--and all women--shall remain under male control" (p. 13, italics in original).

According to O'Reilly (2004b),

Motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood that is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word *mothering* refers to women's experiences of mothering that are female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women. The reality of patriarchal motherhood must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of gynocentric or feminist mothering. In other words while motherhood, as an institution, is a male-defined site of oppression, women's own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power. (p. 2)

Umansky (1996) also introduces two competing views of motherhood: the negative discourse focused on “motherhood as a social mandate, an oppressive institution and a compromise of woman’s independence” and the positive discourse that states that “motherhood without patriarchy holds the truly spectacular potential to bond women to each other and to nature, to foster a liberating knowledge of self, to release the very creativity and generativity that the institution of motherhood denies to women” (pp. 2-3).

In comparison, Ladd-Taylor and Umansky (1998) describe bad mothers as falling into three general categories: “those who did not live in a traditional nuclear family; those who would not or could not protect their children from harm; those whose children went wrong” (p. 3). With these expectations I am bound to fail, bound to become the dreaded “bad mother.” Bad mothers do not always put their children first; they sometimes get frustrated, angry, jealous, sad, fatigued, discontented, and even self-centered to the point that they may spend time, energy and money on themselves. Bad mothers may also be single moms, lesbian moms, illegitimate moms, step-moms, or moms who have full-time jobs outside the home.

Do we as mothers perpetuate this discourse by trying to live up to it? And by keeping our mother stories secret? Susan Maushart (1999) challenges us as mothers to recognize that mothering is ours to construct:

Our cultural discourse increasingly frames motherhood as a “lifestyle option.” At one level this is of course true. Yet at another level motherhood lies--today, as it has always done--at the very core of the experience of being female. The bearing and raising of children is no longer our inevitable biosocial destiny. Yet it remains the single most potent tie that binds the diversity of our experience as women.

Whatever else it may or may not be, motherhood is non-negotiably ours to construct – or to deconstruct.”(Maushart, 1999, p. 241)

Yet our practice of mothering is based on the normative discourse we have pounding in our heads.

Practice of Mothering

We are the generation that is supposed to have it all, but as Maushart (1999) states, we are also the generation that does too much. I try to tell myself that mothering is one of the many roles I play. However, mothering is not just another role. Mothering requires an investment of my body, mind, spirit, and heart, and it requires a life commitment. I like to think as a mother I have balance, that I can combine motherhood with all my other roles, but what I am really doing is frantically trying to keep all the balls in the air, trying desperately not to let one of them fall, particularly if it is one of my children, and I am trying to do this without anyone noticing.

I think about the words of the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland: “It takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast” (as cited in Maushart, 1999, p. 171). I have run as fast as I possibly could many times--firing on all cylinders--and still I felt I was not doing enough, or I was told I was not doing enough. I never thought to stop. Before my divorce, I was mothering three children with a frequently absent parenting partner. I had two jobs related to my nursing career, I maintained a large farmyard with a market garden and greenhouse for a period of time, and I also owned and operated a small inn at a near by resort. And I am still running now. It was crazy making then, now, and in between, yet I would not dream of crying out and telling how hard it is to manage, how frustrated I feel, how alone and overwhelmed I feel and how guilty I feel for not

being a better mom. Is this busyness related to trying to meet the expectations of motherhood according to the normative discourse and trying to do it all?

Kitzinger (1992) captures the enormity of the role of mothering--both the challenges and the joy:

When she becomes a mother, it is as if a woman must go deep in the bowels of the earth, back to the elemental emotions and the power which makes life possible, losing herself in the darkness. She is like Eurydice in the Underworld. She is pulled away from a world of choices, plans and schedules, where time is kept, spaces cleared, commitments made, and goals attained, to the warm chaos of love, confusion, longing, anger, self-surrender and intense pleasure that motherhood entails. (as cited in Maushart, 1999, p.102)

So why don't I stop and smell the roses, hug my kids more and smell their skin and hair? Why do I keep busy with so many other things? What am I trying to prove? Why do I try to do it all? When I am finally wearing my red hat and purple dress, will I regret not being more successful, more recognized, more esteemed, or will I regret not spending more time with those I love?

If I judge myself against the normative discourse, I am most definitely a bad mom. As I complete the mental checklist, I realize I fit the majority of the criteria for a bad mom. I would be required to attend a 12-step program for bad moms if there were such a thing. I have actually spent time, energy and money on myself, but of course not without some form of guilt. At times, when longing to pamper myself, the guilt was so high that I couldn't follow through.

I have always worked full-time outside the home while attempting to mother full-time. I have also been known to exhibit emotions other than happy, content, satisfied, and have been so

tired I suggested my daughter take a bus to her ringette practice in the middle of winter. I am a single mom, a divorced mom, and an illegitimate mom. I have failed to protect my children at times; I have told them to feed themselves and even suggested they do their own laundry, dishes and vacuuming. My only saving grace is that my children have not gone wrong. I am not sure how that happened. They appear to be happy, responsible, well adjusted, involved in healthy relationships with family, friends and significant others, and most days they like me.

However, I have failed to maintain the image of a good mom. I have, similar to many women, tried to maintain the façade that I am happy and fulfilled. I have tried to wear the mask that Maushart (1999) describes, the mask of motherhood that is an “assemblage of fronts--mostly brave, serene, and all knowing--that [mothers] use to disguise the chaos and complexity of [their] lived experience” (p. 2). Mothering is messy. Denying the messiness causes us guilt, anxiety and resentment (Maushart, 1999). In fact, if we are honest, we are all bad mothers, according to the dominant discourse of mothering. And thus we all feel blamed, anxious, ashamed, and inadequate to some degree. This dominant discourse causes us to question our mothering ability, so we strive to become a better mother, the idealized mother, and we hold our secrets of frustration, anxiety, guilt and anger because if we share those stories we will be seen as an unfit mother. However, holding our secrets of mothering and maintaining the silence influences our practice of mothering.

And so there is a disconnect between the discourse of mothering and the practice of mothering. How mothers are socialized--the messages we hear and the expectations of mothering (both ours and others)--does not fit with how we think, feel and behave. This disconnect or gap between discourse and practice is a systemic disconnect. It is shaped by silence and is influenced

by political, social and economic structures. However, the size of the gap and the degree of disconnect is often individualized. What we believe and come to understand from the messages that bombard us about how we as mothers ought to feel and behave affects our practice of mothering. Our expectations of ourselves as mothers are distant from our actual experience of mothering. This distance is often determined by our degree of acceptance of the normative discourse of mothering. It is often an individual perspective. It is an individual acceptance of self or not. This great divide, in many respects, reminds me of a group therapy exercise I implemented with a group of “troubled/struggling youth” a number of years ago.

The purpose of the exercise was to identify attributes and factors that contributed to their self-concept and self-esteem. The therapeutic benefit was the interaction and discussion with a goal of achieving a greater understanding of self and individual circumstances. Each individual youth received a large piece of bristle board. They were instructed to divide and cut the bristle board in half. On one piece of bristle board they put their name and labeled it “My Real Self.” We sat around on the floor with magazines, catalogues, comics and newspapers. The youth cut out pictures and print they believed depicted who they were as a person, attempting to reflect inner qualities and outside interests. They proceeded to paste the pictures on the bristle board adding comments, art and other decorations to complete a collage of their “real self.”

During the next step of the exercise, the youth labeled the other piece of bristle board with their name and the title “My Ideal Self.” Again we sat around on the floor cutting and pasting and creating another collage that reflected their image and perspective of what their “ideal self” would be. The therapeutic benefit of the collage creation was the interaction and discussion of their thoughts, feelings and interpretations while compiling their creations.

When the two collages were completed the youth were instructed to lay the two on the floor in front of them with one hand on each collage. They were then asked to demonstrate how close their real self was to their ideal self by moving their hands together or apart depending on how significant they perceived the distance or gap between the two. Again discussion and interaction was encouraged to explain their reasoning behind their perception of the difference between the two. It was then explained to them that the “real self” represented their self-concept and the difference or gap between the “real self” and the “ideal self” represented their self-esteem. The closer the two were, the higher the self-esteem. We then discussed what was getting in the way of bringing the two closer together and what needed to happen or what they could do to bring them closer together.

The gap between the real self and ideal self in this exercise reminds me of the gap between the discourse of mothering and the practice of mothering. My “ideal self” would represent the normative discourse of mothering and my “real self” would represent the practice of mothering. I would have no problem gathering material from magazines to represent and create a collage of the ideal mother according to the normative discourse. I would, however, have a very difficult time finding any images in magazines that represent the real experience of mothering, the practice of mothering. Perhaps we as mothers need to gather together and produce creative collages of what we are hearing from the discourse, what messages are resonating with us, what messages we are internalizing and what messages we believe. We could also discuss and create collages that reflect what our experience is really like, what our practice of mothering looks like from our own individual perspective, and finally perhaps we could place our hands on the pulse of mothering, on our creations of the mothering experience. Then we could identify and

discuss the great divide. We could, most of all, share our experience. We could describe it, feel it, relive it and untangle it.

When I think about sharing our experiences and expectations as mothers, I am thinking about other mothers my age who have a certain degree of wisdom based on our ability to reflect on our many years of mothering. But I also think about young mothers of today. I talk to my students who are young moms, and I talk to my daughter's friends who are young moms, and I am struck by the anger and bitterness towards their partners who, according to their perspective, do not share equitably in parenting. As I explore this further with them, I hear stories of how they feel responsible for organizing everything. Their partners may get the groceries, but they make the list. Their partners may baby-sit (and they use this term) if they want to go out, but they have to have supper ready before they go. Their partners may do the laundry, but they have to sort the clothes first. Their partners go on golf weekends with the guys, but they never have a getaway with their girlfriends. They are all well educated, intelligent women with good jobs, yet they are bitter and angry at their life situation. They don't feel they have any time for fun, and if their partner suggests they go out together and get a sitter, they are infuriated because there is so much to do at home, so many chores left undone.

I have suggested they pack up and leave for a weekend and they look at me incredulously, as if I can't understand how inept their partner is and what a disaster it would be for them to leave. I suggest that their partner and their babies and children would survive, but they don't believe me. They say it is not worth the effort. I am baffled and discouraged by this but I may be missing something. Are their partners inept and uncaring? Do their partners have a chance to parent in their own way? Do these young moms believe they are the only ones who can

care for their children the right way? Are they afraid of what might happen if they let go of some of the parenting? Why do they seem so stuck and bitter? Why are they so surprised? Why didn't someone tell them? Perhaps feminism is more of a given in the workplace than in the home. Perhaps they do not feel as secure and confident as a mother compared to as a professional. Perhaps their rights and privileges are not as clear at home as in the workplace.

We, as women, have moved forward regarding professional recognition, but we are still spinning our wheels when it comes to mothering. These young moms seem to love their little babies dearly, but they do not love mothering. Perhaps they do not recognize their own value, the value of mothering. According to Sarah Dowse (as cited in Maushart, 1999) "mothering is the ultimate act of human achievement" (p. 15). I laughed when I read Susan Maushart's (1999) disclosure of what she read on a public washroom wall: "If men could have babies, childbirth and childrearing would be a sacrament" (p. 17). It's funny but perhaps true. Shulamith Firestone (1972) in *The Dialectic of Sex* advocates for the abolition of motherhood through cloning technology. Although her ideas are very controversial, she did identify that the issues related to human sexual politics will not be resolved until there is equitable distribution of responsibilities for reproduction and care of the young. What are these young moms struggling with the most? They seem so surprised at how they feel and, I think, how they are behaving. The expression of their bitterness and resentment is often evident in their behavior. Their expectations of mothering seem to be very different from their actual experience. I think I had similar thoughts, expectations and surprises when I was a young mom.

My disconnect between the discourse and practice of mothering seemed much more real and pronounced when I was a mother "down on the farm" than it does now as an "academic

mom.” I was defeated and powerless down on the farm. Perhaps I feel more in charge now, but I still feel the anger as a mother in academia. Have I merely replaced the demands of the garden with the demands of a successful grant? The normative discourse has shifted, but it remains shaped by the workplace: farm vs. faculty, and my situation has shifted. I have a better sense of who I am now, and I am in a better place in which to express that sense of self and purpose. I have faced criticism in academia regarding the focus of my work and its inability to attract Tri-Council grants, but I carry on with what I do best, what I enjoy most and what I believe makes the most difference in the adolescent community. Similar criticism “down on the farm” may have reduced me to tears or, at the very least, increased my self-doubt.

I have changed. My children have changed. I have more experience and so do they. Hopefully I have gained a tiny bit more wisdom and a sense of where I am going. That doesn’t mean I don’t struggle with the discourse. The grand narrative of academia does not address gender and motherhood. It does not reflect the messiness and complexity of mothers’ lives, nor does it address the multiplicity of mothers’ lives and the challenges and struggles most faculty members face. The discourse is challenged when we share our struggles and our stories--when we remove the cool and competent mask and we tell it like it is.

However, I still feel the pangs of guilt when I challenge or disregard the discourse; when I say, “To hell with it, I can’t possibly do it all, so I will choose my priorities and the rest can wait or rot.” I envy Margaret M. Gullette (2004) who wrote about her fury and wrath when her husband and son left for a canoe ride without asking her to go along. I could relate to her hollering into the empty outdoor space, “Get back here. How dare you?” And I can also relate to the reaction of her husband and son with their “astonished, sorrowful eyes and their foolish,

remorseful and frightened faces” (p. 177). What I wish I could relate to is her insistence on “not being insane but an unjustly treated woman” (p. 177). But although she felt innocent, she still felt guilty. And I can most definitely relate to that.

I love that story and have read it many times. It is not only Gullette’s profound ability to write creatively and descriptively but also the graphics of the incident that intrigue me. I am sure most mothers can relate at some level to letting the anger seep out and then feeling guilty after. The story is also poignant because the writing is so descriptive that you can picture her ranting and raving on the shore and no one hearing her or paying attention until she picks up a shovel. I laugh and cry every time I read it, yet a part of me also feels sorry for the dad and son. But I think we can do both (relate to her and to her family) and then perhaps we won’t feel so sorry and so guilty if we express our mother anger more often, if it doesn’t seep out in rage because we have held onto the legitimate anger for so long. Perhaps then our anger will not bring on such disbelief, sorrow, remorse and fear from those we love. What would happen if we confronted the chaos of mothering, named it and acknowledged it? What would happen if we broke the silence? Would we realize that we are not alone? Perhaps we need to “name the shadows in order to know the light” (Maushart, 1999, p. 240). And as Leonard Cohen (2009b) sings, “There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

The discrepancy between the discourse and practice of mothering contributes to an identity crisis. As mothers we continue pretending, faking it and keeping secrets; most of the time we have no understanding of what we are doing and why. We just make it up as we go along, and we are reluctant to admit that we can’t cope. Not every mother copes, but few are brave enough to admit it (Gibson, 1986). And so we keep silent. Pretending, as Lerner (1993)

describes, “reflects deep prohibitions, real and imagined, against a more direct and forthright assertion of self” (p. 14). I pretend that I can do it all because I am afraid of what may happen if I admit to my frustration and angst. This pretending limits my ability to project my real self with all its flaws but also its attributes. I want others to believe I can cope. I want to believe I can cope. Cope is a four letter word!

It seems like the less certain we are about what we are doing, the more we fake it. We pretend we’re doing okay, we put on a happy face and we try to make it look easy. Our pretending and our masks hide not only the guilt, shame and blame but also the joy (Maushart, 1999). When we don’t know, we seek out experts instead of consulting with each other. We feel insecure, isolated, anxious and guilty. We don’t want to tell other mothers about our struggles, and therefore we don’t support each other and often we begin to compete with each other. If we feel guilty for our children’s struggles at school, we brag about their achievements in hockey. Sometimes we do the “one up” game or the “better baby than you” game.

My daughter Eve didn’t crawl, but she was my first, so I thought all babies pulled themselves up to the coffee table, let go and walked across the room. I didn’t even think it was unusual that she did this at nine months. Eve did this at a birthday party, and one of the other mothers burst into tears because her baby was 11 months old and was not walking yet. (Eve always was a bit of a show-off). Obviously this mother felt responsible for her baby’s slow start, which wasn’t slow at all. (My baby was just faster). And I was frantically explaining that I didn’t **know** Eve could walk, as if this took the heat off me for thinking I was a good mother or that I could take credit for my baby’s accomplishments. I didn’t want the other mom to feel bad.

Part of this poor mother's reaction was probably due to the mother-blame that is everywhere. This was her second baby and my first. She should have known better; she should have known what to do to make her baby walk first. I once heard a comedian, whose name I regret I can not remember, tell a story about mother-blame that describes someone saying, "My mother made me a homosexual." And the reply was, "If I bought her the wool, would she make me one too?" We hear "the mother made the bad kid" scenario in the media all the time. And the public is always speculating what a young offender's mother "must have been like." Mothers are to blame for all troubled children, youth and even adults.

Mother-blame also comes from the power of creation and the power of mother love (Maushart, 1999). We all know about our biological capacity for reproduction and how we may be blamed if anything goes wrong, and also the power of mother love and how we may be blamed if it is lacking, misdirected or absent. There is an abundance of literature that addresses what parents, especially mothers, can do to their children. But the literature is rather lacking regarding what children can do to their parents, especially mothers, and their effect on marriages. As my colleague said once, "Nature or nurture, either way, it's our fault, we can't win." It is no surprise then that we blame ourselves for our children's struggles, and we are ashamed when we can't protect them or fix their woes. Shame and self-blame are sometimes a very big part of mothering. They certainly were for me.

IV

BEHIND THE MASK: SHAME AND SELF-BLAME

All women have personal stories as vast in scope and as powerful as the numen in fairy tales. But there is one kind of story in particular, which has to do with a woman's secrets, especially those associated with shame: those contain some of the most important stories a woman can give her time to unraveling. For most women, these secret stories are embedded, not like jewels in a crown, but like black gravel under the skin of the soul.

Clarissa Pinkola Este (1992, pp. 374-375)

The Single Mom Then and Now

Single moms until recently have carried the stigma of shame and blame. Disclosing the fact that you were a “single mom” often acquired the response, “What happened?” It was often assumed that no one would choose to be a single mom. By the turn of the last century, single mothering began to be seen as more of a lifestyle choice (Juffer, 2007). However, this option is mostly attributed to mothers who are able to support themselves and their children. Recent movies and television shows validate and even glamorize the experience of single mothering and an organization, “Single Mothers by Choice,” (<http://www.singlemothersbychoice.com/>), has been formed in the United States. My experiences of becoming a single mom were in the late 60s and the early 90s when there was a degree of stigma and suspicion surrounding the experience. As a result I felt the related feelings of shame and self-blame, but I tried to hide these feelings and project the image of a “good mom” despite my circumstance. Single mothering was not a lifestyle choice for me either time.

The Divorced Mom/The Single Mom “In the Big City”


Divorce was definitely not in my life plan. I honestly thought it would never happen to me. I must have believed that people just limp along forever together and unless something

catastrophic happens they just keep limping. And so I kept limping and the catastrophe came. It didn't really come out of the blue. The clouds slowly built up, the wind got stronger, and the environment got chilly, dark and ominous. I saw the storm gathering, but when it hit I was still surprised and unprepared. Even after the storm hit, I told no one. I wanted to pretend that everything was alright. I didn't want people to know I had failed. I didn't want people to know I was undesirable. I kept it a secret as long as I could. Breaking the news to my family and friends was extremely difficult, but it did not hold a candle to telling my children. I wanted more than anything not to deliver that message. I wished for a miracle to make everything okay or at least to allow us to continue limping and still cross the finish line.



It is moving day. The kids have gone to stay with their grandparents. I watch as the movers load up all our belongings and empty out the mansion in the wilderness. The movers keep commenting on how difficult it must be to leave this beautiful home and yard. I just nod but I think, "This is not a home, this is only a house," a house built in an attempt to make me happy when we did not move to Regina as a family. I cry and smoke most of the day. I was never a good smoker. I only smoked at work to fit in, and I needed to keep my smokes in the fridge or they would dry out before I smoked them all. They don't have a chance to dry out now. I am "chain smoking," and I can't eat. I am awake for 18-20 hours a day and rarely sit down. I have lost 20 pounds and I am on my way to losing 10 more. I blame myself for my predicament, and I am too ashamed to tell anyone my husband has left me. Mixed in with that is anger. But because it is mixed up in a pot of emotion, my anger

is fragmented. Pieces of anger are mixed in with pieces of shame and blame. The anger never comes together; it is never whole and thus has no power. I think I am also afraid of my anger. If the angry pieces start coming together and gaining force and power, I will probably explode and the anger will leech out from behind the mask.



It took me a long time to tell my colleagues about my marital separation and even then I told only a few. The news spread like a prairie fire. Most people were very surprised; they had no idea that my husband and I had been having problems. Most people thought we had a great relationship. How would they have known any different? I wore the mask well; I never complained. I convinced them everything was okay in my attempt to convince myself of the same and to project the image of the happy couple, the happy family, the good wife and the good mother.

My mask was now cracking. My relationship with my husband was cracked, our family was breaking apart, the image of good wife was shattered and the image of good mother was tenuous. I reflect on Maushart's (1999) book *The Mask of Motherhood* and her explanation that all masks are props for pretending. Regardless of it being a comic or a tragic mask the expression projects uniformity, predictability and stasis: "Masks portray emotion inert and unmixed in a trade off of range for impact" (p. 1). I needed my mask to stay in control. This self-control helped me deny, repress and misrepresent how I was really feeling and how distorted and chaotic my experience was. Maushart (1999) makes sense of this as she recognizes the construction of a situationally appropriate mask as both an advantage and a curse: "The critical distance...lies between self-control and self-delusion" (p. 2).

I had tipped the scale and had fallen into self-deception and self-delusion, but as my mask began to crack I had this fear that everybody would know. They would know I didn't have it together, I wasn't happy, I was discontent and I hated where I had ended up. My life was not perfect, my marriage was a farce, my children were hurting, I was out of control and everybody knew. I still wanted to hide the fact that I was separated, about to be divorced and alone. I was ashamed of where I had ended up, and I blamed myself for my predicament but there was no turning back. To be or not to be separated and divorced was out of my control, but I still tried to hide and avoid the issue.

I am in a lineup to pay at a busy bookstore. The book I am holding is titled *Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends* (Fisher & Alberti, 2000). I have really been struggling since the separation and someone has recommended that I read this book. I hold the front cover close to me so no one can read the title. I don't want anyone to see the title and then realize that I am probably a dejected and lonely woman. I usually get into conversations with other people when I am in a lineup but not today. Someone might ask me what book I am purchasing. I finally get to the cashier and the young girl behind the counter announces, "My mom is divorced, and she found this book very helpful." I smile at her lamely, and I am mortified that everyone in the bookstore now knows the truth about me. If I could only speak, I might lie and say it is for a friend. How sad is that?

I read the book (Fisher & Alberti, 2000), and some things make sense to me. It outlines a 19-step process of adjustment to the loss of a love relationship. The first few building blocks seem the hardest. These include denial, fear, loneliness, guilt and rejection. I try to work through the steps and move up the pyramid. One step on the second level is called openness and it describes coming out from behind a mask or removing the mask. This resonates with me. It explains how a mask that we choose is probably an appropriate mask, but a mask that chooses us is probably not. A mask chooses us because we are not free to expose the feelings that are underneath. And in that sense the mask controls us.

I recognize that I am wearing a mask to protect myself and also to hide from others how I am feeling. My mask portrays someone strong and in control, someone not wounded, someone who can manage this situation. But on the inside, behind the mask, I feel dejected, unlovable, shameful and a failure--a failure as a wife but mostly as a mother. I feel helpless and confused. My mask provides a safe emotional distance, but it is also getting in the way of connecting with others and perhaps getting the support I so desperately need. Reading *Rebuilding* (Fisher & Alberti, 2000) helps me recognize that my mask is preventing closeness, intimacy, and safety with another person, the very things I long for. What's more, my mask is also keeping me from knowing myself. By blaming myself and portraying a strong exterior, I am denying my hurt and loneliness. But I had worn a mask for a long time. I was socialized within my family and through the normative discourse to portray more positive emotions than I was actually feeling. Also taking off the mask may put me at risk to be hurt or rejected again. I am losing my inner self and am lacking an identity. The shame and self-blame surrounding the divorce is overwhelming at

times. However, I am learning that my mask has become somewhat inappropriate and unproductive.

It is now almost two years since our separation. We have been in court for three days. I didn't know divorce was so difficult. We take a break from the proceedings, and I go outside for air. I am surprised to see my soon to be ex-husband walking towards me. I look at him and feel sorry for him. Why? I go to say something to him, but he just looks at me with disdain and crosses to the other side of the street. I feel it again. I haven't felt like this for a long time. The shame and blame return.

On a cognitive level I know it doesn't make sense. Where does this shame come from? Is it separate from my self-blame or connected? Why is it that his presence or any encounter with him makes me question myself, doubt myself and dislike myself? Perhaps it is because he holds my secrets. He is the only one who knows how unhappy, bitchy and discontented I was. He is the only one who knows how badly I struggled and how frustrated and angry I was. He frequently accused me of hiding my ugly side from others. Maybe I need to understand why I felt that a part of what he accused me of might be true. Was my shame about not being true to myself and not being the person I wanted to be or was it about not wanting others to disapprove of me? Was my shame connected to the normative discourse related to a "good mother" and a "good wife"?

Was my shame related to my sense that what I should do and how I should act was based on what others thought of me? Or was my shame based on my awareness that I had infringed on my own autonomous values and beliefs? Perhaps I was concerned about what others thought, but

that concern may have been based on my desire to appear worthy to those who held me in high regard and those whom I respected, which is very different from shame based on guilt and fear. Perhaps my reaction to my ex-husband was exactly that.

How we think morally and what our values are based on is found in relationship. It is through relationship that we develop, find and discover ourselves. When we fail others we feel shame. What about when we fail ourselves? Perhaps my shame was based more on failing myself, on not being the person I wanted to be and knew I could be. If I could have acknowledged and shared this shame, would I have been able to work through it? Would I have been able to reconcile this shame with myself and perhaps others, especially my children? I think that carrying that shame while mothering must have affected my parenting. Disclosure of my secrets and my shame might have freed me from my mother guilt and self-blame. My shame was about my fear of who I had become, and my guilt was about what I had done and how it had affected others, particularly my children.

When the divorce settlement comes out many months later, it is fair and equitable. I don't feel sorry for him anymore. I feel understood, legitimate and deserving. Suddenly the word divorce doesn't sound so bad. I am a divorced woman, a free woman, an independent woman and, most importantly, a single mom. Custody was never an issue. I am truly a single mom. I can parent my way. I can merely say "Thank-you" when people tell me how great my kids are.

This sense of legitimacy and entitlement removed the shame and blame to some degree and, for the moment at least, I did not feel the need to keep the divorce a secret any longer. I began to tell people with some degree of pride that I was in fact divorced. I obviously needed someone else's "judgment" to feel worthy. I realize the shame and blame is partly of my own making. I would not judge others so harshly if they were divorced. I would not blame them. I would not tell them they should be ashamed of themselves.

Feeling shame and being ashamed of myself has, on occasion, gotten in the way of doing things I need to do to heal and to accept the circumstances of life both now and previously. I realize the only person I can improve on is the person I am right now. If I feel shame and I blame myself for my circumstances, it is a call to look at those circumstances and begin to understand who I was at the time they happened. Who was I at the time I made those decisions? Who was I when I thought and behaved in that way? Did it make sense that I felt the way I did? That is not to deny my responsibility because we all need to take responsibility for our actions, but given the circumstances, did I cope the best I could? I need to recognize my contributions to the circumstances but also others' contributions and those circumstances that were beyond my control. Taking all this into account, did I do my best? Even if I didn't, I can not change the past. I need to look at the past a little more closely, try to understand it, try to understand who I was at the time and go forward with more insight in order to create a present and hopefully future life with less regret, less shame and less self-blame. Perhaps part of that is recognizing who I am now and who I was then. My becoming requires an acceptance and forgiveness of myself and integration and understanding of my experiences that contributed to who I am today as a mother and a woman. It also requires a recognition of the messages that I have heard for many years

about how I should feel and behave. The normative discourse does not encourage me to share my struggles, but without sharing, it is difficult to achieve wholeness and acceptance of self.

I look back at myself and I try to remember how all this started. How have my experiences influenced my mothering? I reflect on the girl who was quite sure of herself in adolescence but who has kept a secret from that time in her life. Perhaps that has gotten in the way of integrating that young woman with the woman I have become today.

I look back to my teen years and my struggles with being an illegitimate mother. I have carried that shame for a long time and have allowed myself to separate from it. The sharing of that situation, and the decision I needed to make, is one of the biggest secrets I have ever kept. And I don't understand why. I still find it very difficult to tell this story. Perhaps it is about shame. The shame is not about getting pregnant; it is about giving my baby away. And so I tell my story. I tell my story to my baby--my 40-year-old son, Dave. Perhaps at the end of the story I will see my circumstances through a different lens. Perhaps it will provide healing for both Dave and me. Perhaps it will reduce the shame.

The Illegitimate Mom

May 22, 2009

Dear Dave,

You were born forty years ago today. Happy Birthday! I wanted to write this to help you understand our history together. This is a story about you, but mostly about me. I want to start by telling you about my "uncle Dave" who, coincidentally, has the same name as you. His name was Davidson, Alexander Murray (Dave).

He was one of the most kind and gentle men I knew. He was my Uncle Dave (my Dad's brother) and I loved him dearly. I have many fond memories of him. I remember when my Dad bought Uncle Dave's car for me for my 19th birthday (first car). I cried and so did Uncle Dave. As a child, I remember hanging around his farm with him and going out to the barn to see the bulls. I remember him running across the corral once and grabbing me off the top of the fence where I was perched. He scared me, but he explained gently that the bulls were being de-horned and they might charge the fence and I might be badly hurt. As an adult I remember going for sailboat rides with him, watching his home movies and talking about cameras and photography. He always seemed happy to me.

I remember one day in particular, our final day together. I met him on the highway that morning as I drove to work. He appeared to be driving in the direction of his home. It was seven in the morning! Apparently he had gone out early to pick up some Saskatoon berries or raspberries for my Aunt Irene for breakfast. He had chest

pain later that day and came to the hospital where I worked. Shortly after his admission, he went into cardiac arrest. I did cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and he revived and said, "Oh, Lee, I must have fainted."

"Yes Uncle Dave you did. You will be okay," I replied.

I was leaning over top of him giving him chest compressions and those were the last words we spoke.

He was one of the most kind and gentle men I knew.

I think I was like a daughter to him. He had one son, Brian, who was like my big brother in some ways. My Mom trusted him and let me do things and go places she normally wouldn't have if I hadn't been going with Brian.

Uncle Dave's wife, my Aunt Irene, was wonderful and bi-polar. She could be so happy and so much fun, but she could also be sad and withdrawn. Sometimes she wore very bright clothes and laughed a lot and other times she wore old clothes and never went out. I tried to convince her to go out one Sunday, but she stayed home, and on Monday she committed suicide. Then we realized the secret of her bi-polar disorder. I

think it is important for you to know these secrets in order to put in place some of the pieces of your family history.

It seems wonderful, mysterious, and almost fate, that you have his name. I didn't name you Dave. I wish I had. You seem like a Dave to me. You definitely seem like one of the Murrays to me. You probably know what I mean after meeting us all, especially my brothers. They are very happy for me that we found each other (thanks to you). As I write this to you I think back to the letter I received from Social Services. It was a surprise, an awakening.

The letter read:

Dear Ms. Murray,

I am trying to locate Barbara Lee Murray born on June 2, 1951 at Watrous, Saskatchewan. I believe you are this person. I have important family information to share with you.

In the event you are not this person, please call me to advise, so I may continue my search elsewhere.

I am hoping you will respond to this letter by calling me collect.

Your cooperation and understanding is most appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Social Services Program Worker

It didn't make sense at first, and when I realized what it was about, I left it and didn't respond. This all seems very ridiculous and incomprehensible now that I know you. I don't know what I was afraid of. I don't know why the secret seemed important to protect, perhaps because I have protected it for so long. Maybe I don't know how to tell. I have had so few tellings of this story, and I don't know what to expect for a response. I don't even know what response I would hope for. Am I afraid I will be judged? There have been a few occasions where I had the opportunity to tell.

I am sitting in the lunch room at work and talking with the other nurses about a young patient we had cared for and her decision to give her baby up for adoption. One of my colleagues says, "That could be me in there. I'm just lucky I didn't get pregnant at her age. I got into a lot of trouble in those years, but pregnancy wasn't one of them." I struggle to say something. I remain silent and the moment passes. I wish now that I had had the courage to tell my story then, maybe even to my young patient.

I am out for coffee with a few of my friends and we are talking about the trials and tribulations of raising teen-agers. One of my friends says that adolescents today are so

much more informed than we were. "They seem to have healthier relationships and are more knowledgeable about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and birth control," she says.

"Knowledge may have prevented STIs and pregnancy, but has it developed healthier relationships?" I reply.

"Maybe not but at least they can talk about birth control and they can take 'the pill' if they choose. We never had those options. We were afraid to even talk about it. We were afraid of being bad girls," she insists.

We all nod our heads in agreement. I think back to my own story of teen pregnancy and want to tell, but I don't and I wish I had. I think they would have understood.

We are having one of those mother conversations that start out silly and end up serious. One mom says, half jokingly, "I've thought about just giving them away and letting someone else raise them."

We all laugh and then are quiet.

Another mom says, "I can't imagine what it would be like to give up a child. I don't think I could do it."

"Neither could I," I reply, and then I realize what I have just said.

I am not thinking about you Dave, at this moment; I am thinking about my children Eve, McLeay and Jordan whom I have raised since birth. I can't tell them about you now. I already feel judged by them - and myself.

"A different time, a different place. We should never judge," I think to myself.

What was it that stopped me from telling in these instances? I feel bad when I think of you and wonder how this may make you feel. I want you to understand that the decision not to tell is about me and not about you and maybe that isn't fair. I wonder if the not telling is about deceit or self-deception. Or is it my fear of being judged? Standards have changed. I wonder if it would be helpful for you to understand how the norms and standards of society have changed somewhat from the time you were born.

Teen moms are more accepted now and they receive much more support and understanding. There is much less pressure for unwed/teen mothers to give their babies up for adoption. Unwed mothers were considered somewhat suspect at that time if they did not give their babies up for adoption, and social welfare was reluctant to provide support without careful investigation and surveillance (Juffer, 2007). It wasn't until the mid 70s that the term "unwed mother" was replaced by "single mother."

Pre-marital sex is generally more acceptable now and not as taboo as it used to be. However, I tend to judge myself and perceive being judged on the standards of society at the time of my pregnancy. There was a lack of harmony between my behaviour and what was acceptable at that time. The normative discourse did not include discussion about conditions that contributed to teen pregnancy such as lack of knowledge, lack of access to birth control, lack of sexual education and the possible lack of consideration for the determinants of health in the young mother's situation.

I was quite aware of those standards as a young unwed mother to be. When I read the literature now, I begin to understand that my reactions and responses were quite typical of unwed mothers of the time. I'm sure the literature is quite boring to you, but some reflection on it may help you understand the situation and dilemma I faced as an unwed teenage girl expecting a baby in 1969. The implications of "Woodstock" had not permeated rural Saskatchewan as yet.

Illegitimate pregnancy and unwed mothers were hush-hush in the culture of the 60s. I exposed "the limits of what were culturally thinkable about proper sex and

motherhood" (Reekie, 1997). My predicament was considered a purely female transgression. My growing belly destroyed the image of chastity. My pregnant body was evidence of my unacceptable sexual behavior and transgressions and I became a sexual, social and moral deviant (Pietsch, 2004). My behavior appeared to challenge my subordinate role as a young woman, and I was labeled as mutinous, rebellious, uncontrollable and uncontrolled, unclean, disorderly, deceitful, disrespectful, misbehaved, as getting myself in trouble, and as a social problem (Solinger, 1990; 1992; Vance, 1984). As an illegitimate pregnant woman, I was stained and marked.

The culture of the time supported a secret adoption plan where "the unwed mother could put the mistake – both the baby *qua* baby, and the proof of non-marital sexual experience – behind her" (Solinger, 1992, p. 346). Repentance was most often achieved through an adoption arrangement (Pietsch, 2004), which also provided the infant with a normative (two-parent, heterosexual, traditional, married) family (Solinger, 1992) who were financially and morally fit (Wegar, 1997). The illegitimate mother could revoke her sin, restore a semblance of normalcy,

delete the illegitimate child from existence, and expunge her sexual past. Was any of this behind my decision to adopt? Was it the agenda of others? I never meant or thought about you as a mistake. I was naïve and made a mistake in judgment. I never wanted to delete or deny your existence, but is that what I have been doing by keeping it a secret over the years? On a conscious level that was never my intent.

I wasn't striving to have my bad behaviour expunged nor did I want to hide my baby. But is my secret of illegitimate mothering part of the image I have portrayed in the past? Is there an attempt to maintain this image of success and morality? Probably in high school I would have been considered the girl most likely to succeed and the least likely to get pregnant. Does my past as an unwed mother have anything to do with my success (or not) or my morality? Does my reluctance to tell maintain the normative discourse of unwed mothers? Does it maintain and reinforce this distorted idea of illegitimate mothers being social and moral deviants?

My awkwardness and reluctance to tell comes from a place deep inside me, a place where explanation is difficult to find. I am trying desperately to sort this out,

to help both of us understand why this is a difficult story to tell. Perhaps, once I tell, I become vulnerable. There is no turning back or taking back. I am left wide open to absorb the reactions of others. Part of what gets in the way of my telling is the expected response of the listener. It is difficult to share something so intimate and yet central to one's life (Bok, 1989). When I tell, I want the listeners to share the burden of the story. I want them to understand the circumstances of the time, the difficulty of the decision, the impact of my youth and to empathize with my sadness in giving you away and my joy in meeting you after all this time. I also want them to ask questions to further their understanding and perhaps, in so doing, to further mine. I also hope listeners may assist in a possible interpretation of my sharing or disclosure, and ultimately assist in reaching through the layers of secrecy: "Once named [secrets] are forced into the light, compelled to take an identity" (Bok, 1989, p. 77). Perhaps it is this identity I am afraid of.

The need for privacy and time also hinders my telling. The disclosure of intimate secrets takes time: time for the telling and time for the listening and

exploring. I am reluctant to share my secrets unless I have a sense that the listener and I will have the time and also the privacy. And both are very difficult to guarantee. I have this visual picture of entering this ideal cone of silence, listener and teller together, for an agreed upon amount of time. I suppose, with all my preconceived conditions of disclosure and the sharing of secrets, it is not a surprise that I still hold some secrets very close.

Lack of reciprocity also hinders the telling of secrets. I am more likely to disclose my own stories upon hearing the story of a similar experience to mine. As Bok (1989) explains,

When self revelation flows forth in one direction only, it increases the authority of the listener while decreasing that of the speaker. In ordinary practices of confiding, the flow of personal information is reciprocal, as the revelations of one person call forth those of another. (p. 80)

I don't recall anyone I know telling me her story of being an unwed teen mother. I know there are others just like me, but no one has disclosed this secret to me.

I also wonder if the listener will be discreet in the retelling. Some secrets I want to tell myself and only to whom I choose, but I realize that, once told, secrets have a way of seeping out to include one more person at a time and unfortunately we are unaware of all those who know. In writing autoethnography for my dissertation and having it available in the public domain, I need to assume everyone has the potential to read my work and know my secrets. And in the sharing of my secrets, outside the dissertation, I need to accept that all have the potential to hear as well. Will the telling of my secrets allow me to heal and reconcile those things in my past that I do not readily share? My regrets about not telling are usually related to a missed opportunity for possible intimacy and healing. Will it be an opportunity to recreate myself and gain new insight that is not possible through introspection itself? Will the telling alleviate my guilt and bring forth transformation? Will the telling provide healing?

I think the first person I want to tell is you. I have told my children and some of my close friends about you but I have not told them the story of my pregnancy or

your birth. I remember telling McLeay about you when he was about 12 years old. We were driving out to the lake together, and it just seemed like the right time to tell him. After I told him my story he simply smiled and said, "Cool, that's a real cool story Mom. Wow!" And of course all my family and relatives know about you, and the friends I had in my teens know as well, but I want to tell you about your birth and our week together as mother and son.

I was almost 18 years old when you were born.

It is dark and I stand and gaze out the window. My back is sore, and I rub it and walk around the house. I don't want to wake my Aunt Irene. I have been away from home for a month, staying at my aunt and uncle's home. I am seeing an obstetrician rather than our family physician and I will deliver in a city hospital rather than our local hospital. I am out of sight.

I don't feel well, but I don't really feel sick. My back hurts and I just want to walk around as fast as I can. I guess my walking wakes my aunt. "Are you okay?" she asks concerned.

"I don't know. I'm scared," I whisper. She asks me if my stomach feels tight.

I answer, "No but my back is so sore. I feel like crying . . . but it comes and goes and I think I can stand it if it goes away soon."

My aunt phones Sandra (her daughter, the nurse). She is at work at this very moment on labor and delivery. "Does it sound like labor pains?" my aunt asks.

"No but bring her in anyway, just in case, and we'll assess her," Sandra replies.

The nurse is trying to do an admission and assessment on me, and I am already holding on to the top of the hospital bed and everyone is trying to settle me down. Sandra gives me a cigarette and tells me to try to relax. I can't relax; I have to go to the bathroom. I want to push. People are starting to look anxious; someone checks me again and says, "Let's move her."

Move me where? I have to go to the bathroom!

They are trying desperately to locate my doctor. I hear the commotion, the hurrying, the bustling, the almost panic. Now I AM scared. My back hurts and I want to stand up. I can't stand lying on my back. They are making me lie on my back, and they are putting my legs up in the air. What is going on?? Where is Sandra??? She looks upset, she looks a bit panicky, and she looks like she is going to cry. Help!! I want to be brave, but I don't know what is happening. Soon I hear Sandra's voice, very quiet, very gentle, "It is almost over Lee, you can push now, push your bottom down into the table, don't lift your bum off the table . . . PUSH!! You're doing good . . . just a little bit longer, hold it . . . you can do it . . . that's a girl . . . It's a boy!!"

I hear the doctor say to take the baby away if he is okay. The baby is fine despite his fast delivery. He is dark, cute, funny looking, red, crying, yelling and I want to hold him. The doctor says to take him away and I say, "I WANT TO HOLD HIM!"

He is gentle but firm: "Lee, if you hold him and get attached to him you won't be able to give him away."

"I promise I will. I just want to hold him." I hold YOU and I fall in love. You are gorgeous, you are red, and you quit crying. You look at me as if you know me and all I want is to hold you and love you for as long as I can. And I do.

I keep you in my room for the next six days and they keep taking you back. I sneak into the nursery during the day and I take you out. I go back at night and hold you and rock you and talk to you and sing to you. I tell you everything I think you need to know. I read to you. I sing some more and kiss and hug you constantly, and all they care about is if I will be able to give you away. I assure them daily that I will. I know I can; it is the best for you and probably for me. They continue to take you back to the nursery, and I continue to take you to my room and keep you in my bed. We were the first rooming-in couple.

Finally, I have had enough. I am mad at the nurses, I am mad at the doctor and I am mad at myself for reassuring them that I will give you away. Finally I explain, "I have had enough . . . If I give my baby away I will have only these five days to give him all the love I can, and it needs to last him for a while so leave me alone, PLEASE!"

And they do, and I give you away.

The day you stayed at the hospital and I left with my mom was the hardest day I ever had. I took you a whole pile of clothes and diapers I had bought. I told them which outfit you were to wear home from the hospital, and I walked away crying and I felt I would never stop. There was a terrible sense that I would never see you again.

I saw you only one more time, in court, when I had to identify you and legally give you away. I said I didn't recognize you: you had changed, you had a rash, you didn't look the same. I was scared you weren't okay. I thought maybe I should take you home. My dad cried when he saw you.

I didn't know what was happening that day. The judge kept asking me if I recognized you and I kept saying, "I don't know" and my dad kept crying. The judge asked if I was sure I wanted to give you away, and he asked my dad if we were sure, and my dad said it was up to me and I said, "Yes." I am so sorry you never met my dad--sorry for you but even sorrier for him. When I told him you were looking for me after all these years, he cried and said, "I have always dreamed of this day."

MY HEART BROKE. I left you and, with you, a part of me. I thought of you everyday. And then one day, years later, I had a sense that you were in harm, that you were sick or unsafe and something had happened to you, and I thought that perhaps you had died. I was even convinced of that. I believe repression, denial and dissociation were very much a part of my grief and the sense that something had happened to you and I would never see you again. It was too painful to think of you everyday and wonder where you were, what you were doing and how you were doing. I built a wall around that part of my life and tried to move on, but there was always a sense that something was missing.

Then one day I opened the letter, and I knew you were in this world, and I had to meet you--but I was scared. Scared most of all that we were different because I didn't raise you. I had raised three children by then and somehow they had very similar values and beliefs to mine and I think I was most afraid that you would think, feel, believe, and understand differently. But we have a very similar world view and family values.

You have many achievements and I am so proud of you. I am also very happy for you. You have a wonderful wife and family and gorgeous children (my grandchildren) and I can not thank your parents enough. It is hard to know where to go from here. I have kept this secret for so long, and I don't understand why. Perhaps it is related to shame, but I was never ashamed of you.

However, I don't remember feeling very ashamed of myself either at the time although there were reminders that perhaps I should have been. Unfortunately, it was members of my future profession who projected their disdain the most. I remember several of the nurses being quite nasty to me although I told no one about it. I think I felt that maybe I deserved it. I had acquired a third-degree tear because of your rapid birth, so it was difficult to walk and almost impossible to sit because of the pain. One particular nurse would roll up my bed very fast to sit me up for my meals. I would ask her to please go slowly because the pressure upon sitting so quickly was extreme. She would just look at me with disgust and keep rolling my bed up. Sometimes it hurt so much I would wince or cry. In addition, I was often denied my pain

medication. The nurses would sometimes tell me that they would get it but never return, and other times they would tell me that I didn't need it. One particular situation stands out for me.

I am returning to my room from the nursery, sneaking you back into my room not realizing there is a nurse in the room making up a bed. She looks up at me, and I brace myself for the lecture. She simply says, "Okay you can keep him here for a while, but you have to take him back before shift change in an hour."

I am surprised at her response and I say, "Thanks."

I decide to try to talk to her a bit and ask her about nursing. She begins to talk about her job and how she hates shift work. I tell her that I am going to be a nurse and she stops and looks me right in the eye and says, "I don't think that is going to happen." I blink back tears and quietly reply, "I have already been accepted." She huffs and leaves the room. I wish I could remember her name.

There was always an underlying perception that I was a "bad girl" now. I had failed to maintain my virginity. I had broken the laws of chastity. I had failed to exercise self-control and had not restrained the male's sexual impulses. My biggest

failure was naivety. I had no useful information regarding sexual health and sexuality. No one had told me what I needed to know. My mom had discreetly left a book about menstruation on my bed one day. I read it. I didn't say anything to her, and she didn't say anything to me. Unfortunately, there wasn't anything in the book related to pregnancy. Fortunately, I was a late bloomer and the information did arrive in time for the big event and miraculously a box of Kotex appeared.

I don't think I was the only one who was naïve. I think my friends may have been as well. We didn't really talk about it. Going on "the pill" was the sign of a "bad girl." Rather the language of the time was a "nice girl" (nice to the boys) as opposed to a "good girl." In some ways I wasn't that different from my peers. Several of my high school friends were pregnant before they were married. The big difference was that they got married.

The really big difference was that I didn't want to get married. That fact was the one that made me weird and particularly bad. How had I gotten myself into that predicament if I didn't want to get married? The miracle of marriage was that, the

minute you said "I do," your sins were absolved, you were no longer an expectant illegitimate mom, your child was no longer illegitimate, you could stay in the good girls' club and people would eventually congratulate you on your pregnancy and the arrival of a healthy birth weight baby even though it was 2-3 months premature. Because of the patriarchal structures of the time, neither sex nor the resulting child had a reality outside of marriage (Solinger, 1992). The message was clear: If you were married you were a more worthy parent than if you were young, single or impoverished (Rolfe, 2001). Unfortunately, I didn't want to get married; fortunately, I was able to maintain this stance and my parents supported me.

In 2003, you decided to find your birth mother. That decision began a series of events and the journey towards our meeting. During May of that year, you received a letter from the Post Adoption Division of Community Resources and Employment describing your birth and your biological mother.

David's natural mother was a young girl of 18 years at the time of David's birth. She was of Scottish ethnic origin and of the Protestant faith. She had a grade 12 education and was an excellent student. She planned to go into Nursing. David's first mother was an attractive, outgoing girl, about 5'5" tall, weighing 110 lbs. She had light brown hair, greenish eyes and a fair complexion. She had an oval-shaped face, well shaped brows, straight nose, high cheek bones, well shaped mouth, large eyes and a round chin. David's natural mother was very musical, having a grade seven in piano and a grade two in music theory. She also played a clarinet in a school jazz band. She also enjoyed sports and drama. She participated in swimming, volleyball, curling and competed in track and gymnastics. She was also active in drama, choir and glee club.

David's birth mother was quite easy-going and friendly, related well with people but tended to make impulsive decisions on occasion. She rarely angered and did not hold a grudge and was not a moody person. She involved herself quite deeply with other people; she was quite determined but not obstinate. She was inclined to be a group leader. When it came to health, she had never been seriously ill. She had undergone prenatal care for seven months prior to David's birth and there was no history of epilepsy, mental illness or retardation, cancer or heart disease in her family.

David's birth mother was single and David was her first child.

I was always rather surprised about how much you knew about me and how very little I knew about you. You have since given me that letter, and it is extremely interesting to read about this young girl, your birth mother, who was me 40 years ago now. You will turn 40 today; I wish we had met sooner. I read the description of myself and I struggle to recognize this person. I barely remember the interview. My only vague memory is that of going through the motions and doing what was necessary but thinking that the interviewer was nosey and weird. I remember

thinking that some of the questions were rather bizarre. My teenaged persona was attempting to look like a "good kid" even though I had already been labeled a "bad girl." But I also felt some disdain for the process and the snoopy interviewer.

My boyfriend at the time, your birth father, had spoken of marriage and so had his family. I wasn't that keen about marriage, and I guess I knew my parents would support whatever I decided. I went along with the marriage talk for a while but things began to change. My dad showed us a small rental home he owned in town just a few miles from our farm. He offered the home for us to live in should we get married. I think the reality of marriage and what it would look like was illuminated for me that day. I didn't say anything, but I knew as of that day that I would not be getting married. I was never sure if that is what my dad hoped would happen, but I knew it was probably the best decision for all concerned.

The next decision was whether to give you up for adoption or have my parents raise you. No other options seemed apparent at the time. My obstetrician highly recommended to me and my parents that I give you up for adoption. I remember

thinking that he was pretty bossy and intrusive, but I also agreed with what he said. There would always be a connection with the birth father if my parents raised you. And also the day would come when someone would have to tell you that your big sister was really your mom. None of that seemed very appealing to me. It was never that I didn't want you or didn't love you. I wanted the best for you . . . and for me.

I remember you telling me, after we met, what a difficult time it was for your parents waiting for the time period to be up when I could change my mind and take you back. That time period was difficult for me as well but for very different reasons.

I missed my Grade 12 graduation exercises, but I passed all my exams, graduated with my Grade 12 diploma and was accepted into a nursing program. It was a new beginning, but with a hole in my heart that would gradually heal although not completely until I met you.

I always envisioned that we would meet in the lobby of the Bessborough Hotel, and we did.

I am sitting on the couch and scanning the lobby and mostly watching the door. I am somewhat nervous but not as nervous as I thought I would be. I have thought about this, dreamed about this day and the whole atmosphere feels surreal. I don't really know what to expect. I keep watching the door with anticipation as I sit quietly on a couch. I see someone come out of one of the hallways, look around and then go back down the hallway. I think that maybe it is you, but I'm not sure. I think that perhaps you are a bit shy or hesitant, and it is difficult for you to approach me. We have sent pictures to each other so we have an idea of who we are looking for. I decide to get up and follow you. I say "Dave?" and you turn to face me. It is you! You explain that you were actually going back down the hall to catch the score of a hockey game. I totally understand that, and we both laugh.

And so here we stand, mother and son, meeting after 36 years. Where do we begin?

There doesn't seem to be any degree of real awkwardness; we seem to connect and relate quite easily to each other. It would be interesting to hear what your initial impressions were. We spend a wonderful afternoon together sharing our lives thus far, asking and answering questions and realizing that we have probably been in the same place at the same time on different occasions. We have similar interests (in particular hockey and golf), we view relationships and the world in general in a similar way and we both love Elvis! I tell you about listening to the song, "In the Ghetto," in the hospital after I had given birth to you. I listened to that song repeatedly during that time, and since that time it has always made me feel sad when I hear it. In fact, I have turned it off on occasion because the sadness became

overwhelming. Listening to that song always takes me back to that time and place and to the struggle of that life altering decision that impacted both of us--and will for the remainder of our lives.

You tell me that "In the Ghetto" is your favorite Elvis song. Of course it is! You listened to it over and over for the first week of your life. I heard that song several weeks after I met you, and I was no longer sad. I merely smile now when I hear it and think about you and me in the Bessborough Hotel. At that moment, I realized I had begun to create new memories and new perspectives regarding your birth and the future of our relationship.

I meet your wife and children later in the afternoon, and we all go out for dinner. It is hard for me to absorb the fact that this is your family and these two gorgeous creatures are my grandchildren. I wonder who they think I am. They are so young; it would be a difficult situation for them to understand. Your wife Kari is beautiful inside and out. She is so supportive of you, and it is obvious she adores you--that you adore each other. And I know that it is partially due to her that we have found each other.

As we say goodbye and make plans to meet again soon, I feel so happy, yet I feel so sad. Sad perhaps, because we have not met sooner. Sad, for missing 36 years of your life. I brought you into this world, but I did not have the opportunity to nurture, support and raise you, to watch you grow and mature and show you every day that I love you. Sad because I am your "other" mother, not your "real" mother.

A young girl who gives her baby up for adoption becomes a mother of sorts, the biological mother, illegitimate and invisible. When she is reunited with her child after several years, she attempts to claim an "other" mother maternal identity (Downe, 2004). But lo and behold . . . it is to feel like an illegitimate mom once again. Mothers who relinquish their babies become "separate, different than and less than full mothers" (Lynn, 2001).

If I had kept you, my baby, I would have been seen as a shameful, filthy, and worthless person, but when I gave you up for adoption I was seen as selfish and uncaring (Lauderdale, 1992). I only wanted the best for you and I thought adoption was in your best interest. There was a perception from others that I would forget about you and move on. I never forgot you. However, I never let myself grieve openly because it was not socially acceptable at the time to speak of my unwed mothering experience. The normal grieving process was inhibited and prolonged with no real resolution of the grief. I never felt coerced into making the decision to adopt--persuaded perhaps, but not coerced. This may have assisted in the adaptation period

following your adoption, but I never felt I had an opportunity to express my feelings regarding the adoption and to acknowledge my unresolved grief (DeSimone, 1994).

When I read the literature I realize that my experience may have been somewhat different from the norm. I can relate to the sadness and grief at the time, but the resulting depression and despair did not grip me in the years to come as is reflected as a common response in the literature. An unplanned pregnancy and the relinquishment of a child for adoption are outside the range of typical adolescent experience and may threaten the successful negotiation of the developmental task of adolescence (Lash Esau, 2000). However, I believe I developed a stronger identity and a higher commitment to succeed (Lash Esau) to prove that I had made the right decision.

I always worried about your health, your safety and your happiness, and I still do. Jordan always tells me I worry too much; he is probably right. I have always loved you, but I am so surprised at how much I like you. You are genuinely a nice person--caring, gentle, thoughtful, generous and so funny. You have a very quirky

sense of humor and a teasing approach with others, and I appreciate that. I think you're great!

I think a small hole in my heart still remains and that is my regret that we didn't meet sooner and we can not be closer, that I can't tell you that I still love you. You are my son. I have never stopped loving you and I wish it were appropriate to tell you so. I wish I could grab my grandchildren and hug them and kiss them and have them be happy to see me, but I am mostly a stranger to them. And I know somehow that you understand this. I can tell by the way you encourage your children to welcome and connect with me. And what are you supposed to do, after all, when I keep whining about not being a grandmother yet?

I also don't want to be too intrusive. I want to maintain connection, but I don't want to overwhelm you or make you feel uncomfortable. I have read about birth mothers fearing rejection, loss of contact and losing their child a second time (Howe & Feast, 2001). I don't have that fear exactly, but I do have a fear that we may slowly lose contact if we don't commit to an ongoing relationship. I wonder how

we can work out a relationship that reflects that we are mother and son and still recognizes and accepts the fact that I am an "other" mother separate from your adoptive mother, your "real" mother. You are my son, but our relationship is different from the relationship I have with my other three children. I think, considering the circumstances of our busy lives, we are staying in touch remarkably well. I appreciate you staying in touch when you are so busy with your family and job commitments.

I will probably always live with the "what if" of a different decision made forty years ago. I imagine a part of you wonders how your life would have been different if I had made a different decision. I'm sure on occasion you wonder what it would have been like to grow up on a farm with older parents and three big brothers and two big sisters. I have not regretted my decision to give you up for adoption, and I hope you haven't. I know your parents definitely have no regrets about my decision, and I am happy that things worked out. One thing I know for sure: you would still

have been a hockey player and probably a golfer as well. It must seem a bit surreal that you have another sister and two other brothers now.

Unfortunately you have not met McLeay yet. I am a bit disappointed with his reluctance, but I try to understand where he is coming from and also how that may make you feel. If it helps at all, he was a bit reluctant to have Jordan in the family as well. I remember telling him I was expecting a baby. I was holding him, and he was sort of perched on my tummy while I attempted to explain to him about my growing tummy, a baby growing inside, the excitement of the impending birth and the arrival of a new sibling. He looked at me with his big green sad eyes and replied, "I hope it's a dog." So don't feel bad; he just needs a little time to come around perhaps. And where is this kid that used to think my story was so cool?

I believe our reunion brings the potential for healing for me and perhaps for you, too. You have obviously had wonderful parenting, and I appreciate meeting your parents and their understanding that you will always have some connection

with your natural family. I truly thank you for your initiative in making the effort to find me.

Take care and I look forward to seeing you again soon. Stay in touch. Hi to Kari, Hope and Tag.

Love,

Lee

Our reunion brings with it an opportunity for healing and also a recognition of the enormity of the loss. But as I face my shame and acknowledge it, I also realize that I am able to reclaim that part of myself that was lost. And so I return to the experience of Tomasulo's chair and the recognition and desire for wholeness, the opportunity to integrate the young unwed mother I denied with the woman I have become.

Tomasulo's chair also takes me back to a very difficult secret--a difficult secret to tell and a difficult secret to hear. I have told the secret to those who are very close to me, and every time I tell the story it hurts. It is a story about Jordan but also about me and our family. It is my secret, a secret of mothering. I tell it because Jordan wants the story to be told.

V

BEHIND THE MASK: LOSS AND GRIEF

The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.
Ernest Hemmingway (1929)

The Unprotective Mom: The Biggest Secret of All

Ahh . . . The Telling. My hope and expectation for a response to my telling of this story is that the person will listen “with a full heart and can wince, shiver, and feel a ray of pain cross her own heart and not collapse” (Estes, 1992, p. 383). But I also want to tell the story so others are moved by it. People seem to respond in the same manner that I tell it. When I first told my family and close friends, I told the story with emotion--grief, despair, disbelief, horror, and they responded in the same way. After a time, telling it to others who were not as close to me, I disclosed in a more matter-of-fact way to not show too much emotion. They responded in the same way, but what I **wanted** was to see their horror, disbelief, outrage, and empathy. I felt sometimes that they were somewhat cold and uncaring in their response. Or perhaps they too didn’t want to show too much emotion. I gained a great respect however for those who did respond with outrage and empathy. I also think that people don’t know how to respond, so they attempt to do what is appropriate, acceptable, and within the norms of society, forgetting sometimes about the injury and pain that has occurred.

All secrets come out eventually, if not in the telling then in psychosomatic responses, emotional disruptions or inappropriate behaviour and reactions. Estes (1992) explains what happens when a woman finds her secret leaking out:

She runs after it with great expenditure of energy. She beats, bundles, and burrows it back down into the dead zone again and calls her homunculi--the inner guardians and ego defender--to build more doors, more walls. The woman leans against her latest psychic tomb, sweating blood and breathing like a locomotive. A woman who carries a secret is an exhausted woman. (p. 378)



I AM EXHAUSTED. Why is **this** story so difficult to tell? What am I afraid of? Why is it a secret? Who does the secret benefit? Perhaps me and mine for a while, but I wonder when the keeping of a secret becomes more damaging than the telling of a secret. Why do we keep things a secret when they are about the bad behavior of others and not ourselves? Or do we think that, had we had better behavior, we could have prevented someone else's bad behavior? What do we choose to tell, and what do we choose not to tell? Why do we talk about difficult knowledge, certain challenges and experiences more easily than others? Why do people respond the way they do to the telling of difficult knowledge, and how does that shape our future telling? How do we learn to talk about difficult topics?

We ALL live with secrets, big and small, shameful and harmless, terrifying and humorous. Why do we choose to tell certain people and not others? What do we want to happen when we tell? Do we have a certain expected response that we want from others? Do secrets lose their power in the telling, or do they gain power?

Today
then the day came
when the risk to remain
tight in a bud
was more painful than the risk it took
to blossom

A quotation from Anais Nin in Ellis & Flaherty (1992)

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It's cold today but still sunny. It is totally white outside with piles of snow everywhere and hoarfrost on all the trees. The sun reflects off the trees and the whole crescent glimmers. I remember the first time I turned down this crescent and feel just briefly the remnants of that feeling of depression that seemed to grip me after the divorce. I feel reflective for a moment but also somewhat excited and relieved that the depression is gone now. I think I may have had a feeling at that time that the depressed mood would last forever, that time would not cure the hurt or the pain. But six years later, I can now reflect in a positive way and be happy that we made the move to this crescent. I love this crescent and nowhere has felt as much like home as this has.

I have had so many happy memories here: Eve and McLeay going through their adolescent years, making many new friends and being so thankful that we moved; completing my education and moving on personally and professionally; being independent and being a single parent and single homeowner. I'm not sure which one was more

challenging. However, I think I was a single mom for quite a while before the divorce and a single homeowner for that matter as well. I love our house now and the yard. It is just the right size compared to the mansion in the wilderness we moved from. The mansion was a beautiful house with a beautiful yard and garden, but it never felt like home. It would be beautiful right now with all the snow on the evergreens planted in rows around the house and down the lane. But this crescent is just as beautiful because it carries with it a sense of freedom and security.

Jordan is playing at the home of a friend. Jordan and Tom (pseudonym) first met at the early intervention programs for children with developmental disabilities. We met again at the playground. Jordan and Tom became good friends and often visit back and forth. It's wonderful. I have gone to do some shopping and am on my way back to pick him up. Tom's mom, Rita (pseudonym), meets me at the door, but she seems upset. She says she needs to talk to me, and she sends the boys upstairs to play a little longer. Rita looks upset and she just stares at me.

"What's wrong?" I say. She still just looks at me.

She says, "It may be nothing, but I overheard Jordan and Tom talking and I was concerned." She stops and looks at me again.

She says, "I hope you don't mind if I asked Jordan some questions?"

What kind of questions?" I ask. "What is going on Rita?"

She explains that she overheard Jordan talking about one of the school personnel, and she was not sure what she heard at first but became more concerned the longer she listened.

"Rita, what did he say? Please tell me what is going on. I'm starting to feel scared Rita. Please tell me."

She says, "I'm scared too. I believe that Jordan may have been sexually abused by one of the school staff."

I stare at her and don't answer. A sudden calm comes over me. Everything slows down. The world goes into slow gear. I see her mouth moving. It's moving so fast. I want to slow it down. I breathe. I try to listen. I hear her. I understand the words. I say nothing.

She is getting upset telling me, "I may have overstepped my bounds, but I wanted to talk to Jordan in case he didn't tell again." She goes on desperately, "It has been proven that when adolescents are having difficulties they often tell their peers, and I guess Jordan isn't any different in that regard."

She tells me again what Jordan told her, but I can't really hear her.

"I will do whatever I can to help," she adds.

I only say, "Thanks Rita."

I don't know what to do. I just stand there. I can't take in this story: my son, sexual abuse, school, inappropriate touching, penetration. They are all words that run together and do not make a tangible story.

I thank Rita again and say, "I need to take Jordan home and talk to him. I can't believe this Rita. How do these things happen?"

She says, "I can't believe it either, but these things do happen." I understand this later when she tells me another story, but I don't understand anything right now.

Rita calls Jordan and at that instant when I see him it hits me. It hits me in the stomach. It hits me in the face. It hits me on my head, my back, again in my stomach. It feels like someone is punching me repeatedly, and I can't stand up any longer. I feel so many conflicting emotions and I only want to grab him, run home, hide and never come out again.

He says "Hi Mom" and my heart aches. I look at him and can not comprehend how these terrible things have happened to him. He is standing there looking at me. I smile at him and try to convey that everything will be alright when I know they can't possibly be okay or ever the same again.

I hug him and he asks me, "Are you mad at me?"

I say, "No, I am not mad. We are going home now, and we will talk when we get home."

"Are you sure you are not mad?" he says.

And I say, "No Jordan, I am not mad at you. I'm glad you talked to Rita. Let's go home now."

I put my arm around him, and we walk to the car.

It is probably still a beautiful day when we walk out, but everything has changed. The cold air seems to bite at my face. I can't seem to see, and I'm not sure I can drive the half block home. I am on this familiar crescent that I love so much, but it feels like I am in a strange land where there is no sound, where everything is blurred and distorted, where

everything moves very slowly and there is no sense of time or place. Even the snowflakes appear suspended, barely moving.

I look at Jordan sitting there looking so small and innocent. Did this really happen? Did this really happen to my son? Did this really happen at school? Is there a pedophile in the school? How could this happen in a school? I want all the questions to be answered with a NO, but I have a dreaded sense that all the questions will be answered with a YES.

I pull into the driveway and don't know where to go from here. I finally get out of the car, but it seems like it takes tremendous energy just to take a step. I take one step at a time and finally reach the front door. Jordan and I walk into this house that has been my refuge for the last six years, and I want a miracle to happen. I want this house, our home, to take all the hurt and pain away. I want Jordan to be okay. I want us to continue on in the day the way we had planned. I want it all to go away. I don't want to keep going, once again. Most of all, I don't want to do what I know I have to do. I ask Jordan if we can go up to his room and talk. He says, "Okay," and we begin the long climb up the five stairs. Each step is harder to take than the one before. I realize that I am not in the moment. I feel my self separate as we climb the stairs. Jordan lies on his bed and I sit beside him.

I say, "Rita said you talked to her today about something that happened at school. Can you tell me a little more about it?"

He looks at me a little unsure and I reassure him that it is okay to tell, it is good to tell, it is not his fault, and he did the right thing to tell. I have given this message so many times in my work but never to my own child.

I am safely tucked up in the corner of the room now, looking down on Lee the therapist, asking non-leading questions as she tries to understand the whole story from the client's perspective. I am safe here. I don't have to deal with this. Lee will look after things. I will let her handle it. She appears to know what she is doing. I wouldn't even know how to start. How can anyone know how to question her own child about sexual abuse without falling apart, becoming deranged or totally losing any connection with reality? I don't even want to hear the story. I wouldn't know what to do. I will leave it to Lee; she can handle it. I am going to stay here, tucked up in a corner in the ceiling.

I will let her continue and try not to get in the way. I am wondering if I will ever come down. Will I ever be able to help her? Will I ever be able to help Jordan? I hear words, but they don't make any sense to me and they are mixed up with the words I heard at Rita's house: my son, school, mouth, school staff, bum, hand, it hurts, tickled, penetration, special friend, pain, school. Who will put all these words together to make a story? Lee will have to do that. I don't think anybody else can.

Is this my fault? Did I fail to protect my child?

Being too busy makes us blind. Having distorted priorities makes us crazy, not at the time perhaps but later when we realize what we did or didn't do. Does my craziness and concern come from the realization that in my busyness I failed to protect my son from harm? Did I miss the signs? Did I fail to translate knowledge into action? I was aware of the vulnerability of my son. I was aware of the statistics. Looking at the literature allows me to separate and to dissociate

to some degree, but my emotion keeps interjecting into the rational examination of the literature. The relationship between the literature and Jordan's personal experience of sexual abuse keeps pushing into my consciousness and screaming out to me that I should have known. I am silent but I am outraged. I am outraged about the statistics. I am outraged these things happen to children and I am outraged nothing happens as a result of this abuse. I am outraged at myself because I knew Jordan was vulnerable. I knew, and I failed to protect him.

After all, I had read about the high prevalence of sexual abuse among children and adults with developmental disabilities, which has been widely documented (Barrett et al. 1997; MacDonald, 1994; Senn, 1988; Sobsey, 1993; 1994; Sobsey & Mansell, 1990; 1994a; 1994b; Sobsey & Varnhagen, 1989; 1991). Both the Roeher Institute at York University and the University of Alberta Abuse and Disability Project have done extensive research in the area of violence and abuse in the lives of people with disabilities. And I was very aware of this research.

I remember reading about the work at the Roeher Institute (1992) and feeling sick knowing that up to 68% of girls with a mental handicap and up to 30% of boys with a mental handicap will be sexually abused before the age of 18. I remember also realizing that it is alarmingly probable that a person with a mental handicap approaching adulthood, like Jordan, will already have experienced some form of sexual abuse. How can this be? How can this happen? How can we stop this? Why is there so much silence surrounding sexual abuse?

I read more now trying to find out what has been done and what can be done about this horrendous abuse of such a vulnerable population. I don't find solutions, just more statistics. Dick Sobsey (1994), a member of the University of Alberta Abuse and Disability Project, confirms what I already knew: most people with disabilities will experience some form of sexual

assault or abuse, and people who have some level of intellectual impairment are at the highest risk of abuse. I feel sick all over again when I read the findings of Public Legal Education (1993) stating that among adults with developmental disabilities as many as 83% of the females and 32% of the males are the victims of sexual assault, and also the findings of Statistics Canada (1994) that state males with disabilities are twice as likely as males without disabilities to be sexually abused in their lifetime.

My son is now one of those statistics. Reading this now as a mom is very different from reading it as a nurse therapist. It makes me shudder when I read this and a chill goes down my back. I feel physiologically and emotionally ill. I am outraged and silenced. I am also ashamed that I didn't adequately teach my son to protect himself. I did not teach him about sexuality at the same early age I discussed it with my older two children. Why didn't I? What was I waiting for? I keep all this shame, loss, grief and outrage behind my mask and I am silent. Part of the silence may be survival but I wonder if, as a mom, I tend to hold this secret because my child was harmed and it was my job to protect him.

Why does this abuse remain so invisible in many ways? Public Legal Education (1993) blames the invisibility on the many barriers to disclosure (e.g. fear, economic dependence, isolation, lack of access to supports, and credibility issues) and on the fact that, when it is identified, it is often unreported and therefore remains invisible to the general public. I can hardly believe it when I read that it is estimated that only 3% of sexual abuse cases involving people with developmental disabilities are ever reported (Wisconsin Coalition, 2003). And yet I can understand this because the reporting process and the experience of disclosing were very

painful for Jordan and me with little display of empathy or concern, especially during encounters with the police.

I recall the ugliness of one encounter.

I'm sitting in front of him, as he shifts his eyes around the room, and I tell my story, a story that breaks my heart. I am so wide open, so vulnerable, in front of him. He keeps bragging about how good he is at his job and all the training he has had. And I keep thinking, "What a loser. I can't even imagine how bad you were at this before the training."

I ask him, "Has the police force ever considered hiring a psychologist to do the interviews, in particular to interview children who have been sexually abused?" He doesn't like the question, and he grunts some response. He has no appreciation for education and expertise. I'm sure he doesn't even know the difference between education and training. He is obviously trained and not educated. He doesn't understand childhood development, family dynamics, counseling theory, sexual deviance, or therapeutic communication. He is trained to spit out the words. He recites the lines but doesn't have a clue what they mean. I want to scream at him. But I don't. I'm a wimp. I fight hard not to be emotional in front of him. My whole body is tight and rigid. I have to read from my notes. He can't look me in the eye. I have to really concentrate to read, and I keep blinking my eyes so I won't cry. That is one thing I will not do in front of this insensitive police officer who tells me, "It only takes a minute for a blow job."

I can't believe he just said that. I just stare at him. Is he trying to shock me? Is he really that insensitive? Is he really that stupid and unprofessional? Trained, yes, but not educated. All I said to him was, "How could the abuse have gone on for so long in a school, and no one notice?" And that was his uncaring, unprofessional, uneducated, stupid, ignorant response. The training course he took must be really intense to be able to come up with a response like that.

He looks so ugly. His uniform is too tight. He must have got it when he was 40 pounds lighter. The top button of his shirt is too tight and the fat on his neck hangs over his shirt collar, and his face looks flushed and ruddy. He has a similar hunk of fat hanging over his belt and he seems short of breath when he speaks. He has these big black boots on and all these weapons tied around his waist. He has to be uncomfortable. I can't imagine what it must be like for him to pour himself into that costume every time he goes to work.

I hate him. I hate him more than I hate Jordan's abuser. Or is this just misdirected anger? Who is doing the most damage? What is more harmful, the initial victimization, or the perpetuation of the victimization?

He's staring at me . . . I think he wants me to leave. He has videotaped the interview, and he probably wants to go. I feel so weak and lightheaded. Dizzy almost. I don't know if I can stand up, physically that is. I obviously can't stand up to this guy cognitively and tell him what I think. I feel small, skinny, and wimpy.

I felt and thought so many things, but I said nothing and I am now angry with myself. Jordan was violated, and so was I. And I am sure the police officer did not believe

Jordan's disclosure. I don't think he understands the utter violation when it comes from someone in a position of power and trust.

I am walking down the street of this city I know so well. I hear the traffic and I see the Star Phoenix clock. It is 11:45 a.m. I should be hungry. I'm not. I feel little and skinny. What a weird thing to think, especially now. I feel almost frail or maybe more accurately wimpy. Why didn't I stand up to him and tell him what I thought?

The abuse of power and trust is so disturbing. I saw this man, Jordan's alleged abuser, in the school many times. I trusted him. I never dreamed he would harm my son. Should I have been suspicious of this man because as an adult he was in a position of power over my son? I knew family, acquaintances and caregivers were the most likely perpetrators but I never thought, even once, that Jordan was at risk or unsafe at school. According to the Wisconsin Coalition (2003), 33% of abusers are acquaintances, 33% are natural or foster family members, and 25% are caregivers or service providers. They also say that 98% of sexual abusers are male and are known by the victim/survivor who has disabilities. I knew this. I should have been more vigilant. I should have asked Jordan more questions about his day, but he was usually with one of us (Eve, McLeay or me), and I always assumed he was safe at school. Why wouldn't I? I have to remember that Jordan was groomed; he was told not to tell and he trusted this individual, someone I am convinced is a pedophile in the school.

I knew that the profile of sexual abuse of people with developmental disabilities has specific differences from that of the general population. The perpetrators of sexual abuse of

children with disabilities are similar to those of non-disabled children, with acquaintances and family members making up the highest group. However, in adolescence, service providers (for example those in educational institutions, health institutions and group homes) become the highest group of perpetrators, especially when the person has a severe disability (Sobsey & Mansell, 1994a; 1994b). Also, people with developmental disabilities are less likely to escape the abuse because of their dependence on caregivers and, sometimes, their limited communication. Perpetrators do gravitate to working in places where there is access and opportunity to abuse these clients with less likelihood of detection (Lawlink NSW, 2003). Of course, the perpetrator would gravitate to working in a school with this specific population. But do schools know this? Do they have a screening process for all people who are employed or volunteering in the school? Do they take specific precautions to protect children with disabilities? What policies do schools put in place to promote sexual health and prevent abuse? And what policies are in place to deal with disclosure?

The extent of this abuse is frightening to me. The abuse of people with developmental disabilities is more likely to be severe and ongoing. Sobsey (1994) indicated that the abuse of people with developmental disabilities is more likely to involve penetration and to occur over a long period of time. This is of course true in Jordan's case, and this is the most sickening part of all, sickening in so many ways.

I hear Jordan crying in the bathroom. He is having problems lately having a bowel movement, so I go upstairs to see if he is okay. He has always struggled with constipation, on

and off as a child, and I make a mental note to myself to provide him with more roughage and fibre in the future.

"It hurts mommy," he says and he is whimpering softly.

I hug him and try to soothe him as he cries and tries to push.

"It hurts," he cries.

"I know Sweetheart. I will give you something to help next time. It's okay. It will soon be over and then we can sit and read a story." I say, trying to console him.

"Okay," he says as he cries softly and I hold him.

When I think of this now, I am sick . . . long and painful retching and vomiting. I can't bear the thought, and I separate once again. I go on with the responsibilities of the day and mothering.

Jordan didn't tell, even then, even when the abuse had become so bad. Had the alleged perpetrator told him not to tell? How had he convinced him not to tell? There are so many things that get in the way of investigating sexual abuse. And there are even more obstacles and, consequently, lower rates of reporting, charging, and conviction regarding sexual abuse of people with developmental disabilities compared to the general public (Connelly & Keilly, 2000). Other studies show that staff working with people with developmental disabilities raised concerns regarding sexual abuse in only 25% of cases. Of those cases, only 40% resulted in legal action, and in 75% of the cases, the offender still had access to the victim (Brown & Craft, 1992). The alleged perpetrator no longer has access to Jordan, but he does have access to other children with developmental disabilities within the school system.

And what of Jordan's secret? Such a large and damaging secret. Why did he hold such a secret, and how long did he hold it? As it turns out, he had held the secret much longer than I care to admit. There seems to be no doubt about what happened to him but no proof of who exactly did it. Jordan and I know who did it, but will the powers that be believe us? Will justice be served, or will this be just another case that went nowhere because it was the word of a child, a child with a developmental disability?

As these statistics indicate, we fail to capture the extent of the problem because of the lack of detection, disclosure, and treatment of such abuse. Jordan had limited sexual education, or education regarding abuse prevention, and may not have recognized or understood the sexual behavior as inappropriate or abusive. He also may have been confused about the emotions surrounding the abuse especially because the abuser was a school staff member, someone he trusted and someone he liked. Disclosure was also difficult because he was told not to tell--not to tell his mom--and he was also told that, if he told, he would hurt the alleged perpetrator's feelings.

The alleged perpetrator must have known Jordan very well because Jordan never wants to hurt anyone's feelings. This was obviously a part of the grooming process. Jordan's symptoms and resulting sexualized behavior were confused with his approaching adolescence and misinterpreted as the lack of an appropriate outlet for his sexual expression. From the school's perspective, the symptoms were quite often attributed to the disability itself. I wonder how the school's response to Jordan's behaviour may have promoted the confusion and misinterpretation. Was the behaviour explained as "just a result of Jordan's sexual development" or of "no appropriate outlet for Jordan's sexual expression" or of "Jordan's Down's syndrome"?

I wonder how long the abuse would have continued if Jordan hadn't had the opportunity to tell his friend Tom? Even though Jordan did disclose, the investigation and charges were hindered because of the carelessness of the investigation, the credibility issue (was he telling the truth?) and the uncertainty about his ability to testify in court. There were many errors and omissions in the investigation and charges were never laid. The whole process was violating and abusive in and of itself. Jordan and I were re-victimized in so many ways. But it was so difficult to speak up at the time. I felt some days that we might not survive. And many people that I saw everyday did not know what we were struggling with. I told only close family and friends. No one else knew. I didn't know how to tell. However, I did write a letter when I felt stronger and was able to reflect on the hurtfulness and violation of the investigation. I wrote the Chief of Police:

TO: Chief of Police

FROM: Lee Murray

Re: Concern surrounding the police investigation of Mr. A

I am writing with serious concerns surrounding the investigation of Mr. A regarding allegations of sexual abuse. My son Jordan was the victim in the above investigation.

Officer B interviewed Jordan at the Children's Centre the day following his disclosure of sexual abuse to me and also to Rita (mother of a friend of Jordan). Officer C then interviewed Jordan a second time a few days later. I am not clear as to why a second interview was conducted. At that point Officer C indicated that he would be the primary investigator. Officer C expressed the belief that Tom and Jordan had been sexually exploring with each other and Jordan had blamed this on Mr. A. This was expressed to me on more than one occasion and also to Rita. Officer C did not believe that Mr. A had sexually abused Jordan and I believe this attitude tainted the investigation.

Officer C was also inappropriate in his comments to me on occasion. For example, when I expressed my disbelief that no one had seen anything unusual at School D between Mr. A and Jordan, Officer C replied, "It only takes a minute for a blow job." The comment was inexcusable and offensive.

The case was sent to the Crown Prosecutor as an opinion file. The investigation went on for a lengthy period of time. It was decided that Jordan would be videotaped at School D indicating where the sexual abuse had taken place. Officer B was now in charge of the case again. A janitor from the school (with no knowledge of the situation) unlocked doors and was privy to the conversation taking place. It was very inappropriate.

Also during the filming, I asked Officer B why Jordan was not allowed to speak on tape and tell or talk about what happened in these rooms if he wanted to. I was told that they did not want information from Jordan more than once. Jordan also wanted to talk to Officer B about the incidents of abuse, following the filming, but again this was discouraged. The tape was subsequently lost for a period of time and upon receiving the tape the Crown Prosecutor was very disappointed with the content of the video. Jordan could not be heard speaking as he was a considerable distance in front of the camera and the person holding the camera gave the commentary. As a result the tape was completely useless to the investigation and no charges were laid.

Officer C called our home with the intent to inform me that no charges were being laid. I was not home and he attempted to leave the message with my daughter, which caused considerable confusion and stress for her. I understand Officer C was going out of town, but it was very inappropriate that a message be left with my daughter rather than speaking to me directly. It also did not provide any opportunity for questions or discussion.

I have some serious concerns surrounding the investigation of this case, and also the interactions that took place between our family and police officers. The situation was extremely traumatic and upsetting for our family and it required a certain degree of sensitivity and consideration from police officers.

I am requesting that the management of the case be thoroughly investigated. My concern is that, because of errors and omissions in the management of this case, other children may also be in danger because Mr. A continues to have access to special needs children within the School System.

I would be willing to provide any further information as required.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this case.

As a result of this letter someone from the police station phoned me after several months and offered an apology of sorts.

"I just wanted to let you know, Ms Murray, that I received your letter and have looked into your complaints," the voice says on the other end of the line.

"I am at work right now. I am wondering if we could discuss this at another time," I reply.

"Well this will only take a minute. First of all, I wanted to explain that the two officers in question are very good police officers and have never had any complaints against them before, as far as I know," he explains and keeps talking, "I am wondering what you would like me to do."

"What are my options? What would you suggest? How did the officers in question respond to the complaints?" I ask, becoming frustrated.

"Well I never really spoke to them, but as I say, they are outstanding police officers," he replies and continues, "I'm not sure what else you want me to do."

"My expectation is that you will follow up on this," I state.

"Well one good thing is that one of our police officers knows Jordan and he said just the other day that Jordan is doing well and you can't even tell that anything happened to him," he says, trying to reassure me.

"The effects of sexual abuse cannot be determined by looking at someone from the outside and from a distance," I reply, getting more upset by the minute. I continue, "Can we finish talking about this at another time? As I said when you called, I am at work."

"Well I'm not sure I can do anything else," he says.

There is a long pause and I think "trained, not educated." I feel traumatized all over again.

Every time I talk about Jordan's sexual abuse or think about it, I relive the experience and the emotions as snapshots in time. I try to dissociate as I write this and do repeated revisions. But I can't separate always. I don't know if it gets any easier with each revision. When I first wrote this piece, I wrote it as a personal piece followed by an analysis with integration of the literature. I also tried writing it by putting the literature first and following that with my own stories related to that literature. The process was very similar to my psychological coping and dissociation. I

would think about my story, tell my story and then I would separate, become distant and objective, and discuss the literature. This process was what I used on a personal and psychological basis as well. I realized that my struggle, to write in a similar way to the style in the other chapters, was related to trying to cope with the hurt and pain that still persists surrounding Jordan's abuse. I can only come up against it for a period of time then I have to separate, become distant and objective and analytical. But my supervisors insist I be more personal, and I understand that. I want to do that. I try but it is not easy. It is easier to try to separate the researcher/student from the mom. The multiplicity and complexity of this particular telling has many dimensions. As I write and read this, I am back in the moment and I feel all the emotions as I relive the experience. And then I am back in the dungeon, rereading and rewriting. I move from a mom to a student/researcher to a storyteller and back to a mom. It feels like a fast frame separation/dissociation. How does wholeness come--or does it?

I believe, when trauma becomes unbearable for the human soul, we end up crazy, addicted or dead. Perhaps time-limited disassociation prevents this from happening. Of course, extended disassociation contributes to a variety of mental illnesses; drugs and alcohol are their own form of escape; and suicide or death is the ultimate escape. But sometimes escape is not an option, so we separate to carry on.

I think back to my nursing education and learning about dissociation as being either positive (healthy) or negative (pathological), depending on the situation, the experience and the reaction to the experience. Myers (2008) explained dissociation as the ability of the mind to hide a memory, a thought, a feeling, or a body sensation for a short or long period of time. I believe my mind does this quickly when it feels that what is happening is too much to handle. My mind

shuts off all or parts of the event. It also keeps this event apart from other information with which it would usually be joined. Dissociation is a way for me to deal with the very hard things in life, in particular Jordan's sexual abuse. It separates the sensation of the pain stimulus from the emotional suffering and my experience of pain (Myers, 2008).

Dissociation is similar to emotional numbing, depersonalization, mental assertiveness or compartmentalization (Myers, 2008). I become numb to the feeling or separate from the event and allow myself to be distracted, which may assist me in maintaining my boundaries and psychic integrity (Myers). I dissociate in response to a painful event; my mind helps me do what needs to be done by giving me just enough information, one piece at a time. At some later date, all the information may be joined and pieced together, perhaps after repeated telling. However, if people dissociate too often or for too long, the mind becomes trained to deal with hurt in this way and a dissociative disorder may develop in the form of amnesia, fugue, or multiple personality disorder (Myers, 2008).

Dissociation may also involve an out-of-body experience (Myers, 2008). This has happened to me, and it was not necessarily a voluntary act. When Jordan told me his story, I separated to a safe place with my mothering feelings, emotions, and thoughts and let my professional and cognitive self listen to comprehend and respond. It was involuntary, and I survived. I survived, I believe, because inherently and instinctively I separated from the emotions that could have been crippling. Dissociation, separating and compartmentalization contributed to my keeping of the secret of Jordan's disclosure of sexual abuse. I could not tell without coming undone. I could not tell without being overwhelmed with emotion. I told my family and very close friends, but no one else knew.

I had just been hired into a tenure track position six months before and I thought I needed to carry on. I still didn't know other faculty well enough to tell them. I didn't tell my Dean, and I didn't ask for any time off. I told my colleagues at my clinical practice sight, who were therapists. In fact, the evening after Jordan disclosed I spent some time with one of them, and he was extremely supportive and helpful. It helps to have a therapist as a friend sometimes, but not always. When I told my story to one of my clinical practice colleagues, she replied, "I am not surprised. I thought something might be going on when you were concerned about Jordan's behaviour." She didn't say anything at the time, and hindsight is a wonderful thing. But if she suspected, why didn't she say something? I have a hard time forgiving her for that.

For everyone else, it remained a secret. What is it about sexual abuse that makes it so hard to tell? Is it about shame? If so, what was I ashamed of? Not protecting my child? The grotesqueness of the situation? My own revulsion or that of others? Was it about Jordan's part in it? Was it about my part, my responsibility, my failure to protect him and my failure to teach him to protect himself? But I kept telling myself, "He should have been safe at school."

Why is this story so hard to tell? What is it about this particular secret of mothering that makes it so hard to tell? Sexual abuse of one person affects many others. It is a difficult thing to tell and a difficult thing to hear. I need to have so many things in place to have the courage to tell: I need space, I need time, I need outrage, I need empathy and I need understanding. And there are no guarantees I will receive any or all of the above. The response to my telling affects future telling. Once I tell, it is disclosed and the secret will fly away like a feather in the wind. I won't be able to catch it. It will travel away to many different places and many different people. I have told on occasion when I wanted to and sometimes when I needed to.

I am here for advice and to tell him about the purpose of my study and my intent to use autoethnography as methodology. I struggle as I tell him my secret of Jordan's sexual abuse. He directs me to some literature that may be useful. He also tells me he heard my father died, and he says, "I am so sorry to hear that."

"Some stories are easier to hear than others, and some stories are easier to tell," I think.

But I **have** told this story now and it has been very difficult. It has torn me apart at times and I have thought that I may never stop crying, but I have survived. I have not thrived but I have survived. I dissociated to carry on, but I continue to tell this story now when I believe others are able to listen. I may be strong at the broken places, but I would prefer to never have been broken at all (Murray, 1997), and I still wish I could protect my children from being broken as well.

I was broken, but am I stronger? Has this experience of mothering affected or influenced who I am today? Has this experience of hearing and dealing with Jordan's disclosure changed me? Has it become part of the person I am today? Does it bring forth more empathy for others? Do I look at the world in a different way? Do I appreciate life and relationship even more? Has it brought my multiple identities closer together? I have told my stories; I have told my secrets and I have wept, but I am still standing:

Tears are a river that take you somewhere. Weeping creates a river around the boat that carries your soul-life. Tears lift your boat off the rocks, off dry ground, carrying it downriver to someplace new, someplace better. There are oceans of tears women never cried, for they have been trained to carry mother's and father's

secrets, men's secrets, society's secrets, and their own secrets to the grave. A woman's crying has been considered quite dangerous, for it loosens the locks and bolts on the secrets she bears. But in truth, for the sake of a woman's wild soul, it is better to cry. For women, tears are the beginning of initiation into the Scar Clan, that timeless tribe of women of all colors, all nations, all languages, who down through the ages have lived through a great something, and yet stood proud. (Este, 1992, p. 374)

I am not necessarily proud **yet**, but I am pleased that I have been able to tell you my secrets of mothering despite the constant struggle, the doubt, the anguish and often the pain. I believe secrets of mothering are a special kind of secret. I believe it is important to understand how they are connected to the normative discourse of mothering. And because of that connection, our secrets of mothering are often about shame. They are often about self-blame. They are often about guilt and self-deception. They are often about grief and loss. Secrets of mothering are often kept because we feel we have failed. And it is difficult for a mother to believe or accept that she has failed her children. It may serve us well to begin to understand what these secrets are all about; why we tell and why we don't; who we tell and who we don't.

VI

SECRETS OF MOTHERING

Secrecy may accompany the most innocent as well as the most lethal acts; it is needed for human survival, yet it enhances every form of abuse.

Sissela Bok (1989, p. xv)

There are many familiar words included in the varying definitions of secrecy and secrets that also apply to the secrets of mothering. These words include *concealment, hidden, set apart, sacredness, intimacy, privacy, silence, prohibition, furtiveness, deception, stealth, deceit, lying, and denial*. However, these words can not be used interchangeably given the multiplicity of their meanings and connotations. Therefore these concepts and meanings can not be included in one definition. For example, deception is often confused with secrecy. All deception does require secrecy; however, all secrets are not meant to deceive (Bok, 1989).

We all understand secrets to a certain degree because we have all, most likely, held a secret, told a secret and/or probed for the disclosure of a secret. Secrets give us power and also undermine our power. They can be oppressive, but they can also be mysterious and attractive. The telling of secrets can cause pain and destruction, but the telling can also give relief and healing. The holding of a secret can cause suffering, but it can also offer protection. There has been much discussion and inquiry regarding the good and bad of secrets: what secrets are good secrets and what secrets are bad secrets; what secrets are bad to keep and good to tell; what secrets are good to keep and bad to tell.

Sissela Bok (1989) discusses this dichotomy of secrets:

Secrecy is as indispensable to human beings as fire and as greatly feared. Both enhance and protect life, yet both stifle, lay waste, spread out of control. Both may be used to guard intimacy or to invade it, to nurture or consume. And each can be turned against itself; barriers of secrecy are set up to guard against secret plots and surreptitious prying, just as fire is used to fight fire. (Bok, 1989, p. 18)

I am very interested in this concept and in particular how it relates to the secrets of mothering. I am interested in how I as a mom, choose what to tell and to whom. How do I decide the time, place, person and secret to tell? I explore this tension between concealing and revealing my secrets of mothering and how these secrets may be connected to the normative discourse of mothering.

I use mythos to explore this tension. Mythos helps me understand the significance and relevance of my experiences. It is a way of making sense. Mythos provides insight and a way of exploring the personal as well as the collective realm of our being, our actions and our struggles (Poulus, 2009). It provides a way of sorting out and unraveling that which eludes our explanation or understanding.

Myth often speaks to the difference between good and evil and to our desire to live a good and fulfilling life, and myth often disturbs our conscience. Myths can also be opposing and in this opposition I find the messiness between good and evil, the disruption of what is good and evil, right or wrong. I discover that a distinction is difficult and nearly impossible because a clear distinction may not exist. And so it is with the telling or not telling of the secrets of mothering. The secrets are not good or bad. Therefore, they are not good or bad to tell. The telling may

provide freedom and relief, or it may cause pain and sorrow not only for the teller but perhaps also for the listener.

The myth *Pandora's Box* speaks to the keeping of secrets and the consequences of telling, and the myth *The Woman with Hair of Gold* speaks to the importance of the telling of secrets. Taking a very narrow stance in trying to understand the secrets of mothering or attempting to evaluate the concept of secrets and secrecy as good or bad, right or wrong, fails to address the complexity of where secrets come from, why we hold them tight or why we let them go. It fails to challenge the normative discourse that may perpetuate the secrets of mothering. If we read only the myth of *Pandora's Box* or *The Woman with Hair of Gold*, we miss and disregard all the messiness, complexity and uncertainty that surrounds the secrets of mothering, all the questions and “what ifs” between the two myths. Therefore, we must consider both.

The Woman with Hair of Gold

There was a very strange but beautiful woman with long golden hair as fine as spun gold. She was poor and without mother or father; she lived in the woods alone and wove upon a loom made of black walnut boughs. A brute who was the son of the coal burner tried to force her into marriage, and in an effort to buy him off, she gave him some of her golden hair. But he did not know or care that it was spiritual, not monetary, gold that she gave him, so when he sought to trade her hair for merchandise in the marketplace, people jeered at him and thought him mad. Enraged he returned by night to the woman's cottage and killed her with his hands and buried her body by the river. For a long time no one noticed that she was missing. No one inquired of her hearth or

health. But in her grave, the woman's golden hair grew and grew. The beautiful hair curled and spiraled upward through the black soil, and it grew looping and twirling more and more, and up and up, until her grave was covered by a field of swaying golden reeds. Shepherds cut the curling reeds to make flutes, and when they played them, the tiny flutes sang and would not stop singing.

*Here lies the woman with the golden hair
Murdered and in her grave,
Killed by the son of the coal burner
Because she wished to live.*

And that is how the man who took the life of the woman with the golden hair was discovered and brought to justice so that those who live in the wild woods of the world, like we ourselves do, were safe again once more (Estes, 1992, pp. 378-379).

Pandora's Box

In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman on earth. Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the god of craftsmanship, to create her and he did, using water and earth. The gods endowed her with many talents: Aphrodite gave her beauty, Apollo music, Hermes persuasion, and so forth. Hence her name: Pandora, "all-gifted." When Prometheus stole fire from heaven, Zeus took vengeance by presenting Pandora to Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. With her, Pandora had a jar which she was not to open under any circumstance. Impelled by her natural curiosity, Pandora opened the jar, and all the evil it contained escaped and spread over the earth. She hastened to close the lid, but the whole contents of the jar had escaped, except for one thing which lay at the bottom, and that was Hope (paraphrased from Bok, 1989; Highet, 1998).

The myth of *Pandora's Box* unfolds the layers and complexities of keeping secrets. It offers an examination of the possible consequences of uncovering and releasing that which was meant to remain hidden and silent. However, the myth of the *Woman with Hair of Gold* tells of secrets being destructive until they are told. It examines the possibility that when secrets are told evil is revealed and evil power is defeated. The keeping of secrets in these myths may be interpreted as being associated with poison, infection, pain and suffering (*Woman with Hair of Gold*) but also with protection, hiding and concealing, and preventing pain and suffering (*Pandora's Box*). The telling of secrets may be interpreted in these myths as being associated with release, freedom, relief, opening up, draining of destructive power, healing, sunshine, fresh air (*Woman with Hair of Gold*) but also with destruction, disclosure, pain, suffering and disruption (*Pandora's Box*). The complexity of the secrets of mothering lies between the two myths and the many interpretations of telling and keeping secrets. It is not as clean as one myth or the other. The ground between the two myths disturbs the dichotomy of good and bad secrets related to the normative discourse of mothering.

Concealing and Revealing the Secrets of Mothering

There is complexity in every secret. The keeper of a secret holds a secret for many different reasons and the same is true for the teller of a secret. And telling or keeping a secret is an individual decision based on experience, social norms and the anticipated consequences of telling or keeping a secret. Future telling may be based on the consequences of past telling. Disclosing the secrets of mothering may bring forth release, relief and healing but also

disruption, pain and suffering. Secrets are told and heard in the teller's and listener's own context.

Disclosure is also related to pain, power and powerlessness, hope and hopelessness, struggles and courage. Guarding or sharing secrets of mothering is multilayered and is often based on the complexities of our past, present and future. Shame, blame, guilt, deception, self-deception, silence and privacy intertwine, conflict and yet come together in our experiences of holding close our secrets of mothering. The depth of the experience and the development of the secrets of mothering may be related to the normative discourse that is clear about who we should be as mothers and how we should think, feel and behave. It is this discourse that causes me to hold my secrets tightly, to hesitate to tell, and to maintain my mask.

I have lived the discourse of "the good mom," "the good wife," "the good farm woman," and "the good academic." Part of living the discourse was maintaining the silence about what I was actually experiencing. This silence perpetuated my secrets of mothering; thus my silence was not only about the unspoken but also about the unspeakable. I know what the normative discourse is and I know what the expectations of mothering are. Because of these expectations, I have often maintained the mask and concealed my secrets of mothering.

Concealing My Secrets of Mothering

Secrets of mothering are often related to the violation of some broadly accepted social or moral code relevant to a mother's culture, religion or personal value system and they are often shame based (Estes, 1992). I believe this is what perpetuated my secrets of mothering. My inability to describe or voice my unhappiness "down on the farm" was related to self-deception and subconscious denial of my own unhappiness in order to maintain the image of a good wife

and good mother according to the normative discourse. Part of my not telling about Jordan's disclosure may have been to keep it in a private domain and protect Jordan without the intent to conceal from others or to deceive them in some way. My reluctance to share my struggles about trying to juggle the demands of academia and the demands of mothering seems more related to maintaining an image of competence and control than to intending to deceive, lie, deny my experience or hide it from others. My reluctance to be more open about being a "divorced mom" and an "illegitimate mom" was primarily about shame and blame. This shame and blame was often associated with the normative discourse of mothering that insisted that I should be ashamed of myself and that my circumstances were my own fault because I was not fulfilling my role as mother adequately. I was ashamed of being an illegitimate mom and also a divorced mom. I kept this a secret for fear of being judged and not being accepted by others if I disclosed.

I also had the fear of loss if I told my secrets. Would I lose friendships and my family's positive regard if I left the farm? Would I be able to support myself? Would I lose recognition and regard if I disclosed my struggles with trying to cope with academic life? Would I lose respect if I told others about my son Dave? Would people think I had failed if I told them I was divorced or a single mom? Would people be offended or judgmental if I told them about Jordan's disclosure? I always found it very difficult to tell others about Jordan's sexual abuse. I was often concerned about the consequences of telling and the fear of an uncaring response often prevented me from telling. And I was often concerned that my telling may result in the loss of a relationship. My secrets were often related to the culture in which I lived. Working within an academic culture I didn't want people to know I was struggling. I wanted to be a good mom and a good faculty member. As a farm wife and mom, I lived within a farm culture that told me what

the expectations were. I wanted to be a good mom and a good wife. I wanted to belong and I wanted to do a good job, a very good job. I wanted to protect my relationships and I was afraid of what people might think if they knew the real me. The problem with this secrecy was that it cut me off from my instinctual and intuitive self. I did not trust my own judgment and discrimination, and I remained silent. I lived not only with the shame of my secrets but also with the fear of what would happen if I told.

Some of my secrets of mothering are kept because I forget (perhaps intentionally), repress or ignore my experiences. I may intentionally forget in order to protect myself and avoid pain and suffering. I repressed my anger, disgust and revulsion regarding Jordan's sexual abuse not only to protect myself and our family but also to survive and to continue mothering my children and moving through the disturbing but necessary steps to at least try to bring about some degree of justice. I did not forget about Dave, but I let go of my constant worry and concern for him in order to carry on with my life. I sometimes forgot, if only briefly, that I was a divorced woman and a single mom, so I could avoid dealing with some of the issues surrounding that for the moment in order to enjoy the time I spent with my family and friends.

Often things are kept secret to protect privacy. We have a need to keep things within our personal domain. When we tell our stories, we may be invading other's privacy. When I told of my experience during "Tomasulo's Chair," I was challenged by someone from the workshop, some weeks later, who said that perhaps it was not fair to Jordan to share this information because it invaded his privacy. I had to agree that it did invade Jordan's privacy because my story included his story. However, if I believe that Jordan's abuse is a private matter and should remain private, how can I insist that child abuse, neglect and maltreatment is everyone's

business? Why may I be judged more harshly for telling than for not telling? Is the telling a way to protect others as well as Jordan? Telling versus not telling becomes very complex.

I realize the importance of sharing my secrets of mothering, but I still wonder about when it is appropriate to share and when it is not; when I am confident sharing and when I am not, and when my sharing brings relief and when it causes further pain. This is a particular struggle when it involves something as sensitive as sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a difficult topic to discuss in general. It is even more difficult when you have been touched by it on a personal level. I have struggled with the telling of Jordan's abuse many times. The normative discourse tells me that I should have been able to protect my child; that is my job as a mom. Perhaps failing to protect my child from abuse is one of my most difficult secrets. I recall specific times I could not bring myself to tell.

I have just left Tomasulo's chair and we break for lunch. After lunch I go for a walk outside with one of the other participants. As we chat about our children's schools I realize the alleged perpetrator works at the school her daughters attend. Should I tell her? I try to sort this out. Celestine prophecy? Is there a reason we are walking together at this place in time? Am I meant to use this opportunity? This self-conflict continues and with it the moment passes. I say nothing. I struggle some more . . . Should I have told? Is there a should or a shouldn't or am I "shoulding" myself to death? Is there a right or a wrong? Is there a time and a place? Am I letting important opportunities go by? I rationalize... Her children are girls and they are not developmentally delayed . . . They should be safe. But . . . others may not be.

Monday, following the workshop, brings with it another missed opportunity. I am at the school office collecting signatures for a grant. I am in the office of one of the participants from the Tomasulo workshop. As we are talking someone else from the workshop walks by, comes into the office and gives me a hug. Someone else walks by and joins us. Same reaction, a smile and a hug. This happens one more time, and soon there are five of us standing in the office reflecting on the workshop. I want to shut the door and ask them if, as a collective, they can try to do something about the alleged perpetrator still working in the school system. Is that appropriate at this moment? Is it worth a try? Time slips by again and I say nothing. I am disappointed in myself once again for not using this opportunity. I try to explain this struggle to a colleague of mine, and she says, "You just weren't ready. When you are ready it will happen." I have said that to others, but I can't say it to myself. In fact, I think she has heard me say that before. I think I have said it to her. But do I believe it?

I wonder now, sitting in the library, what would happen if I told these teachers. What would be their reaction? As we discuss the sexual health education project, they state more than once that talking about sexual abuse and thinking about what may be happening to some of the students they know makes them sick. They state that it is hard to believe that things like that happen to children. They say it is hard to believe that someone could actually harm a child in that way. And they are right. It is hard to believe that things like that happen, mostly because we don't want to believe it.

Should I tell these teachers about Jordan's sexual abuse? Is there a good time or place to tell them? Do I need to prepare them for the disclosure? Should I plan how to do it? Do I show the emotion I feel so they understand, or do I hold back? So many times I have been so close to telling, but something always stops me. I am so unsure of the reaction. It almost seems more appropriate to tell someone in a one-on-one situation. But that would be a lot of tellings!

But if all these colleagues of mine knew what had happened to Jordan, would that change how they view my role in the project? Would that respect still be there? Would they still support the project? Would they still want to be part of these meetings? Would it be too uncomfortable for them to have me around? And yet the longer I hold onto the story the more I feel like I may be deceiving those who don't know.

There are two people I work with on this project who do know about Jordan's sexual abuse. They seem to be able to talk about the sexual abuse issues related to the project in a very matter-of-fact way and to include me in the conversation. I sometimes wonder if they forget what happened to my son. I think it is easier for me to separate when people don't know. I can talk about these issues more easily, more objectively, more distantly, if they don't know. But when someone knows, I feel they should be more sensitive or maybe say something to me afterwards. Maybe they do forget for the moment. Maybe they think it is easier for me that way. Or maybe they think that I am over it now and it is no longer as painful. Maybe they wonder how I can take part in the discussion, and why I do. Do I expect their sensitivity to last forever because they know? Do I expect something in particular from people after I tell?

Do I expect a certain response when I tell my secrets of mothering? I think about this expected response related to my other secrets of mothering and my struggles with the telling of those secrets as well. I often conceal having been an “illegitimate mom.” Although I have told those closest to me about Dave, I do not share the information freely with others even though Dave and I are reunited, and I am extremely happy about that.

My cousin gave a child up for adoption when she was a young mom, and this Christmas she sent a letter to everyone announcing her joy in the reunion with her son after so many years. I don't think I could do that. I have many questions I ask myself regarding that: “Why can't I do that?” and “Should I?” I also struggle with what that is about. Is this a privacy issue for me, or is it still about shame, blame and the keeping of the secret even though I don't understand it? I am conscious of keeping it a secret but I struggle with why.

As I begin to tell my stories and share these secrets, I gain an appreciation of the tension between telling and not telling. I also gain an appreciation of how the normative discourse perpetuates my secrets of mothering. The discourse encourages me to be silent, but I often wonder if there is healing in the telling.

Revealing My Secrets of Mothering

Carl Jung (1957; 1965) supports the telling of secrets as a way toward healing, as does Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992). Jung believed that, when we hold a secret related to shame or injustice, we cannot be healed unless we tell the secret to at least one person we trust. He referred to these secrets (sorrowful errors) as having themes including betrayal, rejection, disapproved interest or lifestyle, unplanned pregnancy, loss of courage, inability to do something, and neglect and abuse. Estes maintains that it is good to tell our shameful secrets, to open the secrets up, to

tell someone we trust, to write a new ending, to examine one's part in it and one's attributes in enduring it.

I suppose I endured the farm as some kind of heroic gesture. I felt like a failure if I could not maintain a job, a farm, an inn and a family. I felt like even more of a failure if I could not be happy and content while I was doing it. The expectations of the discourse were embedded within me, always playing in my head, so I didn't tell of my unhappiness and discontent. I was convinced that it was inappropriate and unacceptable to name it or explain it. I think now about what may have happened if I had told. Who would I have told? Probably my mom. But wasn't she as deeply embedded in the discourse as I was? Weren't all mothers? Didn't we all live within this socially constructed discourse that was designed to promote our silence? Telling my secrets of mothering now--when I am awake to the discourse, when I have been able to step away from it and challenge it--has provided learning, pain and wisdom. And I don't think one can come without the others.

There is a time of decision making, perhaps a moment or perhaps an eternity, before a secret of mothering is revealed. There are many thoughts and feelings that are a part of that decision. For example, my past experiences of telling or not telling and the assumed or expected consequences of telling are all considerations of mine before I tell my secrets of mothering. However, I remain surprised that the same secret can elicit such different reactions.

I call her to see why she left Jordan and her son alone at her home while she got groceries. I decide to tell her about Jordan's disclosure of being sexually abused as a way of clarifying my concern for Jordan and her son. I think she has a right to know this

information if Jordan and her son are going to play together. She is appalled and doesn't think they should get together in the future . . . and they don't.

I feel so warm and comfortable in this home. I can't explain it. It is beautiful yet unassuming. Every room is more beautiful than the one before and the back yard is a dream. It seems like it has been raining forever and now the sun has finally decided to come out. I tell Sherry I am a prairie girl and could never live in Vancouver. She agrees. The mountains make her claustrophobic and the humidity makes her sick.

I am having coffee with Sherry because she overheard I was planning to renovate, so she invited me to see her newly renovated kitchen. We are acquaintances from being at the same Special Olympic functions and we have one very important thing in common: we are both moms of special needs sons. We also have something else in common, but neither of us is aware of that at the moment as we share the warmth of the fireplace and view the serenity of the back yard. I don't know her story when I tell her mine. And I don't know why I tell my story of Jordan's abuse on this particular day at this particular time. But it feels right and I receive the warmest, most caring and sincere response to my secret that I have ever had from anyone else I was brave enough to tell. It feels as though we are isolated in time for that moment. She cares for me, then she is appropriately outraged and then she tells me her story.

Sometimes I wanted to tell and often I felt I needed to tell, but the response to the telling was sometimes not ideal or what I expected. This type of response perpetuated the keeping of the secret once again.

She calls to say that Jordan was inappropriate with a girl at teen club. We discuss the issue, and there appears to be a lack of supervision. I explain my concern for the girl and for Jordan and decide, although hesitantly, to tell her about Jordan's sexual abuse. She is silent for a moment and then responds, "Are you telling me that is why Jordan is perverted? I don't think he should come to teen club anymore."

The mother of one of Jordan's friends calls and I can tell she is upset. She explains that she does not want her son to visit at our home anymore although Jordan is welcome in their home, on occasion, where there is adequate supervision. She explains that her son does not have the same vocabulary as Jordan and there is no need for her son to know about intercourse, sexual orientation or sexual relationships at this point. I try to explain that I think this information is important to our sons but also that Jordan learned much of this vocabulary at an early age because of his sexual abuse. And I try to help her understand that I wish I had told Jordan more about these issues and topics, in the hope that it may have prevented the abuse. She is not interested in discussing it further.

This type of response reinforces the belief that sexual abuse is a shameful secret that should not be disclosed or talked about. The response of these mothers reflects the possible “costs of breaking the silence” (Zingaro, 2009, p. 179). So I can not reassure you that revealing will bring healing. I can not predict, even for myself, the consequences of telling. From my experience, when Jordan disclosed his sexual abuse, there was an overwhelming feeling of failure to protect my child: failure to protect Jordan from the abuse, failure to respond to the disclosure in the most supportive way possible to prevent further harm, and failure to address the social and political environments that allow childhood sexual abuse to continue to happen. There was a need to be a caregiver, a mom, an activist, and an advocate when my world was crumbling at my feet. My responsibilities were overwhelming at a time when my sheer revulsion about the abuse and my overpowering empathy for Jordan rendered me silent and immobile.

Disclosure of the secrets of mothering is often about speaking out (Zingaro, 2009). It is often about finding the courage to tell without knowing the consequences of telling. The decision to tell is a mystery that is not easily explained. I would like to say that the telling of Jordan’s abuse has brought healing, and perhaps it has in some ways. I have told others, until now, mostly on an individual basis but a public telling has its own consequences. My secrets of mothering are now accessible to many and I wonder what the consequences may be of my sharing. Sometimes the struggle continues or increases with a public telling. Often, the telling is only the beginning.

Sheldon Kennedy, who was sexually abused by his hockey coach over a period of many years, describes his painful struggle **after** he spoke out publicly. He explains that he was a hero, a role model; he brought his abuser to justice, and he was still a mess. He explains that no one wanted to hear or talk about that. And this story is repeated for many who have gone public and

disclosed their victimization by someone often in a position of trust and power. They are often depressed and suicidal following “going public.” I have not gone public in the same way perhaps, but I do realize that healing takes time and there are “disclosure consequences” and “a price to pay to tell the truth about ourselves” (Zingaro, 2009, p.180).

I have told my stories to others through the writing of this dissertation. Will there be consequences for sharing my secrets of mothering? Will the consequences of disclosure at a personal level be a runaway story, a reliving of the pain, harsh judgment, blame for my own suffering, or a sense of falling apart, being a mess or coming undone after the telling? Will the consequences for disclosure of my secrets of mothering, at a societal level, be like opening *Pandora’s Box* or growing *Golden Hair*?

Will the telling of my stories and my secrets of mothering disturb the normative discourse of mothering? Will the telling open *Pandora’s Box* and disrupt the image and practice of mothers and mothering? Will this disruption cause us, as mothers, to lose our identity and our responsibilities? Will it provide relief and healing? Will it cause pain and suffering, or will it provide sunshine and fresh air? Will my stories grow like *Golden Hair*? Will they disrupt my perceptions and others’ perceptions of mother guilt, shame and blame? Will my telling disrupt the gaze of dominant others and how that gaze affects us as mothers? Or will a collective telling of our secrets of mothering do many things, both personal and societal? The secrets of mothering that escape from *Pandora’s Box* may cause disruption, sorrow, and pain, but will they also give hope and possibility? Will they promote a growing of our *Golden Hair* and a sense of justice and freedom?

I look back now on what I thought was one of the worst times in my life (my divorce), and I realize it was the best thing that could have happened for me and my children. But I didn't know that at the time. I thought I had failed, and I had no concept that we would all be where we are today. The closing of that door was painful but the door that opened was remarkable. Part of my keeping of that secret may have been about being forced to do something, or being trapped into doing something through the loss of instinct and intuition (Estes, 1992). I had lost my way and my intuition on the farm and I felt unable to change my circumstances. I felt powerless and I was shamed into secrecy. Without instinct, it is difficult to speculate on the outcome before rather than after the fact (Estes, 1992). I was unable to process my situation and also my thoughts and feelings on the farm. I could not make sense of how I was feeling, and I assumed my thoughts must be distorted in some way. I did not trust my intuition and I felt at a loss to make any change. I could not see any alternatives. Although the divorce was painful and traumatic in many ways, it has contributed to who I am today and how I live.

The telling provided an opportunity to name and discuss what my experience was like on the farm. By telling, I was able to begin to understand how my experience on the farm did not match what and who I thought I needed to be. I told the story as I relived the experience and I relived the experience as I told the story. The process became very circular. I felt again the emotions of trying to mother amidst all the other demands of the farming and working life. I learned from the experience of writing, discussing, reviewing the literature, sorting out, constructing and de-constructing as I attempted to understand and make meaning from my experiences. I retold the stories with the normative discourse in mind and with awareness of the mask of motherhood that I wore. I now have an opportunity to go forward and to be mindful of

what the mask was about and how it stifled me from being, growing and becoming. I have the opportunity to rediscover and recapture my instincts and my intuition as a mother and also a woman. I have an opportunity to live my life differently.

Living my life differently involves pulling away from the hold of the discourse. It means forgiving myself for not being a perfect mom; for not being able to single-handedly do everything for my children; for not being able to prevent any pain or harm to befall them; and for displaying emotions seen by the normative discourse as negative. But self-forgiveness requires messy work. It is not a lack of responsibility but a recognizing and owning of what we did wrong or feel we did wrong. It is recognizing our shame, blame and guilt as mothers and examining where it comes from. And perhaps we will realize that we are accepting responsibility for what is impossible to manage. And that recognition is part of self-forgiveness as well.

As I reflect upon my secrets of mothering I am able to recognize that I have begun to forgive myself. I reflect upon my time “down on the farm” and I realize the extreme busyness and craziness of that time and maybe that is part of self-forgiveness. I reflect upon my divorce and I realize that we both failed at making our marriage work and that we are both probably happier now. And maybe that is part of self-forgiveness. I reflect on my teen pregnancy and realize how naïve and immature I was and I forgive myself for an unplanned pregnancy and I also let go of the guilt for giving my baby away. And maybe that is part of self-forgiveness. I reflect on Jordan’s sexual abuse, and I begin to understand that my assumption that he would be safe at school was a normal assumption. He should be safe at school. A parent should be able to assume that. I missed the signs, but denial is often part of survival and Jordan’s signs were confused with normal adolescent sexual development not only by me but by others as well. I

want to move forward now and create a new landscape, a new life, new experiences and new memories.

However, I still struggle with the telling or not telling. Sometimes it is easier to write about my secrets and have others read my work. Because of the ethical requirements of free and informed consent for my family to be included as characters in my stories, I have shared my stories with them. My mom has read the first chapter about her secrets and, although she cried, she also gained a new understanding of how she was socialized to be silent about trauma as a way to protect her own mother. I worry about my mom reading the story of my life on the farm because she may feel bad that I was unhappy and she didn't realize it. She may read the story about Dave and feel that perhaps she did not do enough to support me. My concern is that my stories may upset my mom, yet I believe that, very similar to the stories and secrets we have shared in the past, they will connect us more than they will push us apart. Sharing and understanding usually brings more connectedness than does aloofness and indifference. It may be painful for both of us. I don't know. My mom read the first chapter of my dissertation while her friend Kathy was visiting and she shared the chapter with Kathy.

She is sitting in my living room in the rocking chair and she is crying. She says her chest and heart hurt. I say, "Mom, maybe you should stop reading this." She insists she wants to read it, "That is exactly what we did as a family. We protected our mom and never talked about painful experiences. I never realized that before. I never thought of it as a secret. It hurts to remember."

"I want to talk to you about what you have written. Your mom and I read it again last night and I couldn't sleep. It brings back so many memories of us growing up together in Plunkett and all the things we went through together. I am so happy you let me read this, Lee. It was good for your mom and me to talk."

I also think about my children reading my stories. How will they react to my struggles of mothering? Will it bring understanding or will they feel they were a burden? Will they feel as if their privacy has been invaded? Will this dissertation cause us more grief, or will it connect us more closely? Will it bring forth the growth of the *Golden Hair*, or will it cause the opening of *Pandora's Box*? Growth is often painful.

I send Dave an email and attach my story chapter about the illegitimate mom. There are so many things in that chapter that I want him to know about his birth and our short time together. I am nervous and anxious and I wonder what he will think. He replies, "Wow...what a great well written piece. I agree with McLeay, 'What a cool story.' It makes for a good start to a discussion in the future. Kari also thought it was Great. Thanks for letting me see it. My mom and dad as well as Kari's sisters read your chapter. They said it was well written and an excellent read. My dad got a little choked up. My brother and sister, who are also adopted, say I have received a gift."

Debbie, my co-supervisor, is coming to our home this evening because the ethics piece of this dissertation has still not come to rest. My children will be there. Our plan is to visit, eat and sign the consent forms. It all sounds easy enough. It is procedural ethics, and we need to obtain free and informed consent. Eve and Jordan have met Debbie before, but this is the first time Debbie and McLeay will meet. We barbeque and Jordan insists we eat outside. It is the middle of July but the weather has been cool, windy and rainy. We humour Jordan, put on our jackets and eat outside. It feels good to be outside. The yard is lush, the trees are filled out, the flowers are blooming and the air is fresh and moist. It clears my head and gives me a sense of calm. I am a bit anxious about the evening; I know that the procedural ethics will be the easy part but what about the relational ethics? What will that be like? The kids know what I am doing, but do they know enough? How much do they need to know at this moment, before it is done, before there is even a complete draft? How much do they want to know? Have I involved them enough? Is this part of the secret? Is it fair to them to find out through the reading, or should I be telling them instead? We have talked about the signing of the consents many times, but it is not simple. It is not easy. The complexity has loomed but has never become as evident as it is tonight. I am surprised, yet I am not.

My head is hurting and my neck feels tight. I am trying to concentrate on what Eve and her boyfriend are saying, but I am only going through the motions. I want to push the rewind button. I want to do this over. I want to do a better job of preparing my kids. I want to be a better mother. I have never felt like I wanted to be a better mother more than I do right now.

I see him out on the deck with Debbie and suddenly I realize how those mothers feel when their kids are in therapy with me. Behind the door telling their story to a near stranger with their mother on the other side not knowing what the hell is going on. I want to know what McLeay is saying and I want to know what Debbie is saying, but I also want my kids to have the opportunity to say what they need to without my influence. I am not worried they will try to stop the study. I am not worried that I won't be able to finish. I am not worried that my PhD will be delayed. I am worried that somehow this process will harm them, will hurt them or upset them. That is the last thing I want to happen.

I start to think that I have not talked to them enough, not just about the dissertation but also about my life. But was it theirs to know and worry about? Is it theirs to know and worry about now? Is this too much of a burden for them? I knew McLeay would struggle with this, but I am not worried about him sorting it out. I know he will do that and I am confident he will tell me if he wants me to change or delete any part of the text. But I feel I have let him down by not telling him enough. I still don't want him to know how unhappy I was at one time. I don't want him to think that it was because I didn't want to be a mother or that mothering was a hardship because it never was. Mothering is what kept me going. Mothering is what gave meaning to my life. Mothering is the thing that makes me the proudest of all my accomplishments. I just have to look at any one of my kids and my heart bursts with pride and admiration. And I know that sounds sappy but mothering is my life raft. It has not sunk me; it has not pulled me down. It has held me afloat and carried me to safety many times.

I want someone to tell me what to do. I feel inadequate, immature and unable to know what to do at this particular moment. I am so worried. I want my kids to be okay and I wonder why I am doing this anyway. What is the purpose if it causes such distress for everyone?

McLeay is out talking on the deck for so long, and as a mom, I want to know why. As a researcher, I know it is none of my business for the moment. Debbie is obtaining free and informed consent and I am sitting on the other side of the glass trying to breathe.

He is finally finished and I hope he is okay. It is Eve's turn. I know she won't be as long . . . but she is.

McLeay tells me he has not signed the consent yet, and I am not surprised and I think it is a good thing. I think it is good if he reads the document first and that is his plan. I should have given him parts of the document to read before, but I did give him the piece about the accident and I knew it would be hard for him to read. It would bring back all the memories of that day and his experience being part of that accident. I thought he had not read it because he did not want to, so I didn't want to push any more of the stories on him at this point. It is okay if he doesn't want to read them. But I feel like I have misjudged the situation and not been transparent enough. I feel like I have not done the necessary work to prepare my kids for this evening. If I were honest right now I would have to say I feel like a BAD MOTHER, A NEGLECTFUL AND CARELESS BAD MOTHER. Obviously, the normative discourse of a good mom will forever haunt me.

Eve is done now and she seems upset. I want to hold her and tell her I am sorry, yet I know she needs her space. I am afraid she is going to have a bad evening now or maybe this has ruined her days off. I don't know why I am putting my kids through this, and right now, I don't know why I am putting myself through this. It hurts. It hurts to hear this; it hurts to feel this. I am waiting for these tears to take me somewhere, to take me and my kids somewhere safe, warm and calm. Maybe I am still looking for that "river to skate away on" (Mitchell, 2005).

"Relational ethics is complex and messy," I think to myself. How do we protect the people we love who are characters in our stories? How do we protect them in many ways, not just anonymity or confidentiality? How do we protect their being, their hearts, their feelings and emotions? How do we spare them the living and reliving of pain and sorrow? How best can we still tell our stories?

Eve is worried about me again and still. I don't want her to worry about me anymore. I am okay. I want her to be okay. Maybe I need to tell her that this has been a good thing for me. Maybe I need to tell her that I don't feel like a bad mom as much. I realize I did the best I could and I was a good mom many times. Maybe I should tell her that mothering is worth it. It is joyous and frustrating. It is fun and hard work. It is challenging and it is rewarding. It is uphill and it is downhill. But above all, it is worth every minute. It is worth every story. It is worth every hug, every kiss, every tear and every burst of light and laughter. It is amazing and it is demanding. It is an incredible experience and it is daunting. It is the only time you will fall in love with someone before ever meeting them, seeing them, touching

them and feeling them. It is the only time that you will be able to pull from yourself those powerful feelings of such fierce protection and love.

It is now Jordan's turn. He is quite convinced his story in particular needs to be told. He doesn't want to tell it and he thinks his mom is very brave to tell it for him (for all of us).

Even though I have told, retold, discussed, sorted out, interpreted and recreated my stories and secrets of mothering; even though I have come to understand the influence of the normative discourse of mothering and the mask of motherhood; even though I have pushed back and disturbed and disrupted the discourse, it still has a hold on me. It can still make me feel guilty and ashamed for not being a better mom. How do I move past this stranglehold, this influence, and arrive at a different place? Have I taught my children a new way or will they attempt to live by the dictates of the normative discourse as well?

The three of us look at the menu and try to decide what to have for lunch. We don't often have a chance to meet for lunch, and I am anxious to catch up on what Eve and McLeay have been doing. I have just been to the lake and I tell them all the news I have heard about their past summer friends.

"I heard that Sarah went to Europe for a year. She met someone while traveling and they are planning to get married next June," I tell them.

"I thought she had a baby last year," McLeay says.

I reply, "She did have a baby about two years ago now. She left the baby with her mom while she went traveling."

McLeay looks surprised and replies, "She mustn't have much of a mothering instinct."

I am about to reply, "I guess not," when Eve interrupts and says emphatically, "Who says that a mother is the only one who can look after her children? Why can't the grandmother do that? Why shouldn't she go to Europe if she wants to?"

"I just don't think she has much of a mothering instinct or a connection with her child if she chooses to leave for a year," McLeay explains. He looks at me and says, "What do you think Mom?"

I think about this for a moment and reply, "Well I understand where you are both coming from. The normative discourse of mothering does say that only mothers should raise their children, and they should do that full-time and we become socialized to believe that. We believe that mothers don't care if they leave their children. However, I am writing about disturbing and challenging that discourse and Eve has a point about 'who tells us' that a mother can't leave her child with someone else to travel or pursue her own interests."

Eve and McLeay both groan together.

Eve says smiling, "We were hoping we could avoid the topic of your dissertation today."

"It always seems to come back to that. You need to take a break from it at least to eat," McLeay teases me.

"But the discourse is everywhere," I laugh and add, "How was your camping trip McLeay?"

Have I raised my son and daughter differently? Is this a new generation or does the normative discourse still prevail? Will the discourse continue to perpetuate the secrets of mothering in generations to come? Or will we begin to sort out the secrets of mothering and challenge the discourse that perpetuates them?

Secrets of mothering do protect our vulnerabilities and often offer a sense of staying in control. They often guard against unwanted access by others, preventing others from coming too close, learning or knowing too much about us, and they protect our identity. Secrets of mothering also promote the projection of an altered or distorted image. The discourse of mothering requires that we make a decision about the image we want to project. To tell all our secrets would leave us defenseless and vulnerable. And to keep all things secret is to live an isolated life that lacks intimacy and connection. And so we often hold back certain information or we tell certain aspects of our life at a certain time and to a certain person. We conceal and reveal to project a desired image but sometimes the mask slips. Sometimes others see what we do not want them to see.

Our decision to tell or not tell (who, what, where and why) is based on messages we hear, life experiences, relationships, prior telling, expectations, a need to connect or a need to protect and remain silent. This decision is often closely related to our identity. Secrets guard and promote autonomy, sanity and survival (Bok, 1989). Secrets may allow a balance and delineation

between the self and the outside world. Sissela Bok (1989) discusses the connection between secrecy and identity:

Not only does control over secrecy and openness preserve central aspects of identity; it also guards their *changes*, their growth or decay, their progress or back sliding, their sharing and transformation of every kind. Here as elsewhere, while secrecy can be destructive, some of it is indispensable in human lives. (pp. 21-22)

My identity is transformed by the telling of my secrets of mothering. Others see me differently, and I see myself and my experiences differently. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe living, telling, retelling and reliving our experiences. When I tell my stories, it gives me an opportunity to rethink those experiences, to use the new-found wisdom and other experiences to see my experiences with more possibility, and then to live in the future in different ways than I have lived in the past. My retelling enables me to live in a different way. It also enables others the opportunity to rethink their own experiences and to also live in different ways. It creates a relational knowing. The turns and interruptions throughout the living, telling, retelling and reliving of my stories reflect my movement from pain and suffering to a “safe homecoming” (Zingaro, 2009, p. 176) and hopefully provide reassurance to the reader and me.

I recognize the discourse for what it is and tell my secrets of mothering in relation to my understanding and troubling of the discourse. I tell the secrets I choose to tell. They are difficult secrets to tell and difficult secrets to hear, so I choose to tell them in a storied way. *Pandora's Box* is open and my *Golden Hair* is growing. Telling my secrets is a way of opening up the discourse for discussion, critique and feedback. It is a way of challenging the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and knowing that have perpetuated the normative discourse of mothering and

also the associated shame, blame, guilt and self-deception. The telling of my secrets encourages me to see mothering in multiple ways and to challenge stereotypes, perceptions and reasons behind the perceptions. It exposes the discourse and asks me to think about what use the discourse serves.

VII

DISTURBING THE DISCOURSE AND UNRAVELLING

MY SECRETS OF MOTHERING

The experience of motherhood is mediated through the body to an extent unparalleled by any other form of relationship. Women who speak of being altered by motherhood from the inside out are not engaging in metaphorical flights of fancy; they are expressing literal truth.

Susan Maushart (1999, p. 242)

My hope is to begin to explore the meaning of my stories related to the secrets of mothering. I have tossed the stories about and unravelled them to some degree with the telling of the stories, and readers will make their own sense and relationship to the stories and the unravelling and exploration. However, I want not only to unravel the stories but also to bring the pieces together focusing on connections and interpretation. I recently read a myth of the wild woman archetype that was very powerful for me. While it spoke of the development and power of a woman's intuition, it also spoke to me of the keeping and telling of my secrets of mothering. The power of the myth for me was in realizing the amazing impact "the trust of self" may have on me and possibly on other mothers. This trust of my own knowing, my own sorting out, and my developing ability to accept myself became much clearer to me as I read and interpreted the myth. For me, the myth moved beyond a focus on intuition to a more complex understanding of how the discourse of mothering often perpetuates my own secrets of mothering. The myth gave me a greater understanding of the mask I have hidden behind because of my own fears of what unmasking may mean. It also opened the door for future hope and possibility for a move

forward: a re-creation of the current discourse towards a discourse based on our experience as mothers.

The use of the myth/story of the wild woman archetype encouraged and assisted me to unravel, explore and interpret my secrets of mothering and to sort out how the normative discourse of mothering often perpetuates these secrets. With the guidance of myth, the discourse and practice of mothering will perhaps move from chaos into sense and from darkness into light (Poulus, 2009). Mothering can be chaotic and complex, and it is important to understand this complexity rather than deny it. The darkness of mothering is created by hiding behind a mask that hides us from ourselves and others.

By giving me a deeper way of thinking about my secrets of mothering, this mythical story provided a framework to make sense of my own experience. It also helped me to see pathways and possibilities for re-imagining and reconstructing the discourse in ways that would enable the practice of mothering to be lived out in less secretive ways. Poulus (2009) writes about “the power and resonance and meaning of the great stories that inform and infuse our lives” and “the potential of a *mythical* [italics in original] vision to invigorate our search for higher meaning” (p. 143).

While mythos originally referred to a great story of deep meaning and significance that transcended time, space and earthbound existence, because of the development of science and the push towards rationality and the valuing of logos, mythos has come to mean a false, make believe or devalued story (Poulus, 2009). Science, logos, is objective, theoretical, analytical and critical. It breaks things down into their parts, into pieces, units of information, data and knowledge. However, in recent years, qualitative researchers and autoethnographers in particular

have challenged logos and introduced both mythos (power of story) and pathos (power of emotion) to academia and the study of lives through story. Goodall's (2000; 2008) "new ethnography" suggests and supports reopening the ancient practice of story-making as a legitimate form of academic discourse.

Rollo May (1991) supports using both rational language and myth as a means of effective communication but promotes myth, particularly, as a way to provide meaning and significance:

There are, broadly speaking, two ways human beings have communicated through their long and fitful history. One is rationalistic language. This is specific and empirical, and eventuates in logic . . . A second way is myth. The myth is a drama which begins as a historical event and takes on its special character as a way of orienting people to reality....*myth refers to the quintessence of human experience, the meaning and significance of human life* [italics in original]. (p. 26)

Mythos, pathos and the new ethnography focus on a holistic view of storied life: making connections, bringing together and interpreting rather than pulling apart and analyzing. A mythical and emotional narrative seeks a knowing gained from living and storying our lives in order to make sense of our life and world. So knowledge is "a holistic constellation of practices woven from imaged/imagined, symbolic, narrative strands that come together to form the mythical web of life itself" (Poulus, 2009, p. 149). Mythos and pathos "move us as people, shake us out of our slumber, bring us to life, pump our hearts and light the way in the darkness" (Poulus, p. 149).

The use of mythos to explore and connect my stories and secrets focuses on insights captured by an ancient tale that provides wisdom, healing, possibility and growth. May (1991)

suggests that myth is a healing force, a guide, a provider of possibility and a creator of faith. The integration of myth to interpret my stories and secrets reaches beyond the words of the story to “a deeper meaning of existence and experience and personhood of which the words are symbolic expressions” (Poulus, 2009, p.149). The evocative nature of mythos expands on the purpose of autoethnography to disturb and evoke emotion and insight for the reader. Myth is a “kind of koan rather than instruction. In other words, the phrases are to be contemplated rather than understood literally, a contemplation that might eventually bring a satori or sudden realization” (Estes, 1992, p. 477).

The story/myth of “Vasalisa the Wise” is the story of a mother’s gift to her daughter, her legacy, the gift of intuition: “Intuition is the treasure of a woman’s psyche. It is like a divining instrument and like a crystal through which one can see with uncanny interior vision” (Este, 1992, p. 74). Although all mothers may inherently have this gift, too often we don’t recognize it, are afraid of its consequences, or do not trust it to be reliable. Este (1992) explains the use of intuition for women and mothers:

As women [and mothers] we call upon our intuition and instincts in order to sniff things out. We use all our senses to wring the truth from things, to extract nourishment from ideas, to see what there is to see, know what there is to know, to be the keepers of the creative fire, to have intimate knowing about the . . . cycles of nature. (p. 75)

However, this intimate knowing and creation of fire is often snuffed out by the normative discourse of mothering that tells us our ideas may not be important, our creative selves need to be overshadowed by our diligent and achieving selves and our energy should be put towards building a happy home for our children and our partner. Estes (1992) writes, “This great power

intuition is composed of lightening-fast inner seeing, inner hearing, inner sensing, and inner knowing” (p. 80). However, it is lightening-fast only when we trust it and when we accept ourselves and our ability to mother. And our inability to mother according to the demanding discourse makes it impossible often for mothers to recognize any of their ability at all.

Este tells the tale of Vasalisa to describe the handing down of the power of intuition from mother to daughter and from generation to generation. Intuition represents a knowing, a believing and a trusting in our ability to mother. When we trust this ability, we have less need to keep our secrets and hide behind a mask.

And so we learn from the tale of Vasalisa. The tale begins, “Once there was, and once there was not” to alert the reader “that this story takes place in a world between worlds where nothing is as it first seems” (Estes, 1992, p. 75). Below, I have paraphrased the tale as told by Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992) in *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (p. 74-80). I found many meanings in this myth related to my own life as a mother, and I hope you will too.

Vasilisa

Once there was, and once there was not, a young mother who lay on her deathbed. Her husband and her young daughter sat at the end of the wooden bed. The dying mother called to her daughter, Vasalisa.

“Here is a doll for you, my love,” the mother whispered. “Here are my last words, Beloved,” said the mother. “Should you lose your way or be in need of help, ask this doll what to

do. You will be assisted. Keep the doll with you always. Do not tell anyone about her. Feed her when she is hungry. This is my mother's promise to you, my blessing on you, dear daughter."

And the mother was dead.

The child and her father mourned for a long time. But, like the field cruelly ploughed under by war, the father's life rose green from the furrows again, and he married a widow with two daughters. When the three women were alone with Vasalisa, they tormented her, forced her to wait on them, and sent her to chop wood so her lovely skin would become blemished. They hated her because she had a sweetness about her that was otherworldly.

One day the stepmother and stepsisters simply could not stand Vasalisa any longer, and they said, "Let us conspire to make the fire go out, and then let us send Vasalisa into the forest to Baba Paga, the witch, to beg fire from her hearth. And when she reaches Baba Paga, well, old Baba Paga will kill her and eat her." Oh, they all clapped and squealed like things that live in the dark.

So that evening, when Vasalisa came home from gathering wood, the entire house was dark. The stepmother admonished, "You stupid child. Obviously we have no fire. And I can't go out into the woods, because I am old. My daughters can not go because they are afraid. So you are the only one who can go out into the forest to find Baba Paga and get coal to start our fire again." And so Vasalisa went.

At every fork in the road, Vasalisa reached into her pocket and consulted the doll. And Vasalisa fed the doll some of her bread as she walked and followed what she felt was emanating from the doll.

Suddenly a man on a white horse galloped by and it became daylight. Farther on, a man in red cantered by on a red horse, and the sun rose. Vasalisa walked and walked and, just as she came to the hovel of Baba Paga, a rider dressed in black came trotting on a black horse and rode right into Baba Paga's hut. Swiftly it became night. The fence made of skulls and bones surrounding the hut began to blaze with an inner fire so the clearing there in the forest glowed with an eerie light.

Now, Baba Paga was a fearsome and ugly creature. Even uglier and stranger was Baba Paga's house as it sat atop huge chicken legs that twirled around like an ecstatic dancer. Vasalisa consulted her doll and asked, "Is this the house we seek?" and the doll, in its own way, answered, "Yes, this is what you seek."

And before Vasalisa could take another step, Baba Paga in a cauldron descended on her and shouted, "What do *you* want?"

And the girl trembled. "Grandmother, I come for fire. My house is cold, my people will die and I need fire."

Baba Paga snapped, "Oh yes, I know you, and your people. Well you useless child, you let the fire go out. That's an ill-advised thing to do. And besides, what makes you think I should give you the flame?"

Vasalisa consulted her doll and quickly replied, "Because I ask."

Baba Paga purred, "You are lucky. That is the right answer."

And Vasalisa felt very lucky she had given the right answer.

Baba Paga threatened, "I cannot possibly give you fire, until you've done work for me. If you perform these tasks for me, you shall have the fire. If not, my child, you will die."

"Wash my clothes, sweep the yard and the house, prepare my food, and separate the mildewed corn from the good corn and see that everything is in order. I will be back to inspect your work later. If it is not done, you will be my feast." And with that Baba Paga flew off in her cauldron with her nose as the windsock and her hair as the sail. And it became night again.

Vasalisa turned to her doll as soon as Baba Paga had gone. "What shall I do? Can I complete these tasks in time?" The doll assured her she could and said to eat a little and go to sleep. Vasalisa fed the doll a little too, and then she slept.

By morning, the doll had done all the work and in the evening Baba Paga returned and found nothing undone. Pleased, in a way, but not pleased because she could find no fault, Baba Paga sneered, "You are a very lucky girl." She then called on her faithful servants to grind the corn and three pairs of hands appeared in midair and began to rasp and crush the corn.

Then Baba Paga pointed to a great mound of dirt in the yard. "In that pile of dirt are many poppy seeds, millions of poppy seeds. And I want, in the morning, to have one pile of poppy seeds, and one pile of dirt, all separated out from each other. Do you understand?"

Vasalisa almost fainted but again the doll accomplished these tasks, and when the old woman returned home, all was done. Then Baba Paga called upon her faithful servants to press the oil from the poppy seeds, and again three pairs of hands appeared and did so.

"May I ask you some questions, Grandmother?" asked Vasalisa.

"Ask," ordered the Baba Paga, "but remember, too much knowledge can make a person old too soon."

Vasalisa asked about the white man on a white horse.

"Aha," said the Paga fondly, "that first is my Day."

"And the red man on the red horse?"

"Ah, that is my Rising Sun."

"And the black man on the black horse?"

"Ah yes, that is the third and he is my Night."

"I see," said Vasalisa.

"Come, come, child. Wouldn't you like to ask more questions?" wheedled the Paga.

Vasalisa was about to ask about the pairs of hands that appeared and disappeared, but the doll began to jump up and down in her pocket, so instead Vasalisa said, "No, Grandmother. As you yourself say, to know too much can make one old too soon."

"Ah," the Baba Vaga said, cocking her head like a bird, "you are wiser than your years, my girl. And how did you come to be this way?"

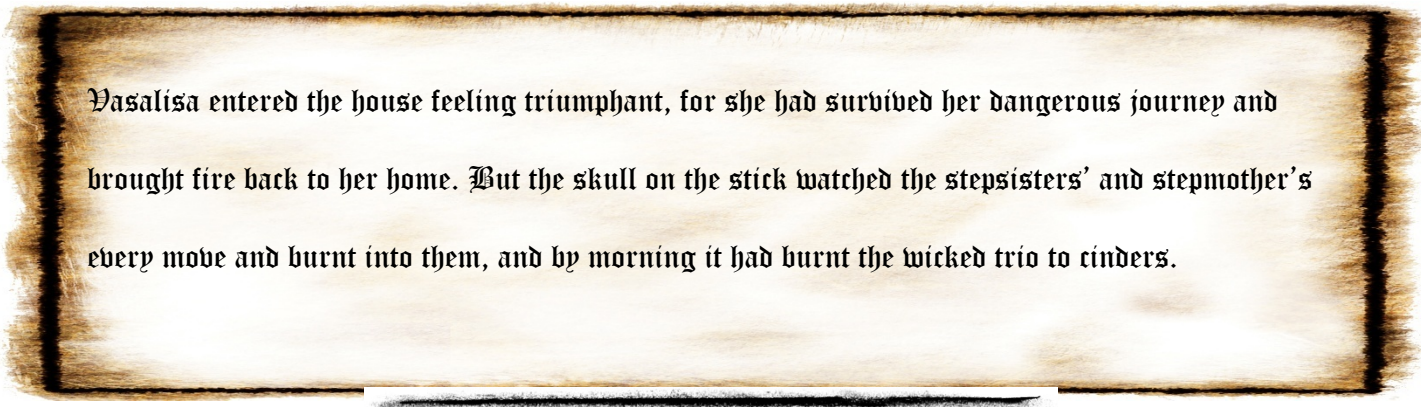
"By the blessing of my mother," smiled Vasalisa.

"Blessings?!" screeched Baba Vaga. "Blessings?! We need no blessings around this house. You'd best be on your way, daughter." She pushed Vasalisa outdoors.

"I'll tell you what, child. Here!" Baba Vaga took a skull with fiery eyes from her fence and put it on a stick. "Here! Take this skull on a stick home with you. There! There's your fire. Don't say another word. Just be on your way."

Vasalisa ran for home, following the turns and twists in the road with the doll telling her which way to go. Suddenly, she became frightened of the skull's eerie light and thought to throw it away, but the skull spoke to her and urged her to calm herself and to continue toward the home of her stepmother and stepsisters.

Vasalisa advanced closer and closer to home. And when the stepmother and the stepsisters saw her, they ran to her, saying they had been without fire since she'd left, and no matter how hard they had tried to start one, it had always gone out.



Vasalisa entered the house feeling triumphant, for she had survived her dangerous journey and brought fire back to her home. But the skull on the stick watched the stepsisters' and stepmother's every move and burnt into them, and by morning it had burnt the wicked trio to cinders.

What an abrupt ending to suddenly kick the reader back to reality! I also feel this kick back to reality, to what the story means to me, to how it resonates with my journey into the forest to begin to find my knowing, my voice, the stories behind my secrets of mothering and the secrets behind my stories of mothering. This myth represents a discovery of self for me. The tasks--of finding and accepting my real self as a mother and learning to trust my own knowing -- give me a way to disrupt and disturb the normative discourse of mothering and a way to untangle my secrets from the discourse. Somewhere in the myth are my own stories . . . and perhaps many mothers' stories. Estes (1992) stories a process of initiation and unfolds a framework for the rediscovery of intuition, which requires the acquisition of certain tasks. Just as with Vasalisa, mastering the tasks at one stage assists us to move onto the next stage or task. Completion of the tasks enables women and mothers to know themselves and reclaim themselves, to be in relationship with their multiple selves and to trust their inner self and intuition. It encourages mothers to remove the mask and accept that they are good enough without it. I use Estes' explanation of each stage of development and the tasks required at each stage of the myth to interpret my discovery of self and my challenge to the normative discourse of mothering. All

quotations regarding the story are from Estes (1992). They will be referenced only by page number.

The First Task: Allowing the Too-Good Mother to Die

In the beginning of the tale, Vaslisa's mother dies and leaves her a doll (intuition), her legacy to her daughter. The tasks of this first stage are

Accepting that the ever-watchful, hovering, protective mother is not adequate as a central guide for one's future instinctual life (the too-good mother dies). Taking on the task of being one's own, developing one's own consciousness about danger, intrigue, politic. Becoming alert to oneself, for oneself. Letting die what must die. As the too-good mother dies, the new woman is born [italics in original]. (p. 81)

There is a time in every woman's life when the good mother of the psyche turns into the too-good mother. The good mother serves us well in our younger years when we can not look after or protect ourselves, but "by virtue of her safeguarding values [she] begins to prevent us from responding to new challenges and thereby a deeper development" (p. 81). The too-good mother "must dwindle away until we are left to care for ourselves in a new way" (p. 81). The beginning of this dwindling away usually occurs as "a girl moves from the fur-lined nest of pre-adolescence to the jolting jungle of adolescence" (p. 82).

This dwindling away and this process of psychological development may have been altered and delayed for me due in part to the psychological trauma of my teenage pregnancy. However, upon reflection, I recognize rebelliousness and definitely a determination to listen to my inner voice and sort out what was best for me at that time in my life. It was the beginning of a letting go of the too-good mother and recognition of a desire to become independent and take

care of myself. I did trust my ability to make my own decisions, to value my own beliefs and values at that time and to eventually give my baby up for adoption despite what others told me or tried to convince me of. I did what I thought was best for me and my baby but not without guilt, shame and the holding of the secret for many years to come.

It was later in my life that I became distanced from my inner knowing of self. The challenges of life “down on the farm” seemed to diminish my ability to know what to do and to recognize what was best for me and my children. The return to the farm brought back those long held values and beliefs about a woman’s work on the farm. Although these values and beliefs no longer fit for me, I was unable to express my thoughts or feelings without feeling guilty and ashamed. I returned to the too-good mother--the dominant discourse of the time. I strived to say the right things, do the right things, and think the right things to fit into the ideal portrayed in the normative discourse of a good mother and a good farmer’s wife. I became timid behind the mask I wore, and I lost my drive and energy to take a risk. I lost my sense of self, my intuition, that voice from within that knew what was best for me and for my children. The voice of the normative discourse said, “You can’t say that you are unhappy. You can’t abandon the farm. What will happen to you if you leave? What will happen to your children? It is better to stay where it is safe.” This voice was the guilty, deceptive, frightened and frustrated voice of my too-good mother within my inner self. I began to “scurry instead of stride” (p. 82). I could not help myself: “[My] life and [my] gifts for expression [fell] into the shadow, and [I] became scant instead of strong” (p.83).

I accepted the normative discourse of the good farm wife and the good mother as what I should be striving for. I believed there was ultimately something wrong with me if I was

discontent and unhappy. My self-deception grew and I could not hear my inner voice; I lost my spirit; and I couldn't find my knowledge or any degree of power to create an authentic life. I continued to wear the mask as a method of survival but also as a protection of my image and my relationships. The result was that I never talked about the discrepancy between how I felt and how I thought I was expected to behave, think and feel; the discrepancy between what I was living and the image I believed I had to live up to; the mismatch between what it was really like and what I had expected it to be. But things began to unravel and come undone despite my most valiant efforts to hold them together, to retain the mask and project the image that everything was okay.

I began to let the too-good mother go but not willingly. It was out of my control. It was no longer my decision to end the marriage. I knew that things were not working, but I couldn't let go. I knew it might even be for the best, but it was difficult to admit that I was unhappy and discontent. I knew I needed to let the too-good mother die; the normative discourse was no longer useful, but I was afraid of what that might mean and what others might think. I wanted to make a change, but I was also terrified. I needed to go deep within myself to find the wild mother--a mother who could ignore the normative discourse, a mother who could admit she was unhappy and could name the unhappiness, a mother who was both "teacher and escort . . . who was a loving mother, but also fierce and demanding" (p. 83), and a mother who could recognize and acknowledge that it was okay to leave the farm, that it was okay to seek a better life for herself and her children and that it was okay to pursue her own desires and dreams. When I was able to find some of that strength, I was able to take a certain degree of risk. I was able to trust

that I was capable of being independent and making reasonable decisions for myself and my children. I began to trust that voice that had always been there.

There was something in life that I wanted to reach, something worth taking a risk for. I wanted to reach the goals I knew I was capable of and I wanted the best life for my children, and neither was happening in the environment we were in. I always knew that I was capable of furthering my education. As a daughter, I believed that all things were possible for me to achieve in my life in terms of an education or career. As a wife, I became uncertain of what my capabilities were and what was reasonable to expect as a wife and particularly a mother. Was it acceptable or was it selfish to go back to university when I had three children to support and look after?

I was pushed out of the familiar and safe nest on the farm and forced to attempt to fly. I was anxious, uncomfortable and not completely ready to leave, but I knew intuitively that something was waiting for me in “the forest.” The forest for me was the big city; life away from the farm was my unknown. I didn’t know what to expect and there were no guarantees. It was a tremendous risk to venture into the forest with three children in the hope of making a better future for all of us. I needed to find my fire, but I was terrified to start looking. I didn’t know where to find my ability, my creativity and my passion. My first step was letting the too-good mother of my inner voice go. Letting go of the normative discourse that dictated I behave in a certain way or carry the guilt of being a failure. My second step was to hold on to the doll while I learned its uses. The doll, the wild mother, the mother without her mask, undoubtedly had a lot to teach me, but could I trust her?

The Second Task: Exposing the Crude Shadow

In this part of the tale, the stepfamily comes into Vasalisa's world and makes her life miserable. The tasks of this stage are

Learning even more mindfully to let go of the overly positive mother. Finding that being good, being sweet, being nice will not cause life to sing. (Vasalisa becomes a slave, but it does not help.) Experiencing directly one's own shadow nature, particularly the exclusionary, jealous, and exploitive aspects of self (the stepmother and step sisters). Owning these. Making the best relationship one can with the worst parts of oneself. Letting the pressure build between who one is taught to be and who one really is. Ultimately working toward letting the old self die and the new intuitive self be born [italics in original]. (p. 85)

The stepfamily represents the undeveloped shadow elements of my inner self; the elements that are considered by the normative discourse of mothering to be undesirable, useless or negative and to be hidden behind the mask. But negative shadow material can be useful, for when we recognize and acknowledge those elements, we are made stronger and wiser.

I attempted to be the good mother. I was a slave to the farm and I was compliant. But to be myself would have meant letting people see me without my mask and risking their rejection. And yet, in order to comply with the demands of the normative discourse, I was losing myself. I felt the demands of the discourse whirling around me as I stood on the edge between farm and city. I felt a tormenting tension and I needed to make a decision. I needed to make a choice. I heard many messages as I stood there torn between two worlds: "You better stay here for now where you have support and help. It will be too hard on your kids. Going back to university,

changing homes and changing your work situation all at once is too stressful and overwhelming. Don't go yet." But in order to regain my life I needed to do something different. The normative discourse and my inner stepfamily voices told me I couldn't do it. It would be too much for me to handle. I had been nice and good when I should have been knowing. I had set aside my insight in order to get along. However, in the oppressive circumstances, my attempt at being the good mother and wife meant hiding my gifts even from myself. I seemed to be on this eternal merry-go-round to prove my worth. I did what was expected of me, smiled as I worked and never complained. Estes (1992) refers to this as deadening ourselves: "Women who try to make their deeper feelings invisible are deadening themselves. The light goes out. It is a painful form of suspended animation" (p. 87). My fire had gone out. I needed to walk into the dark uncertainty of the forest and find my fire. I needed to step into another life, one based on my inner knowing, and let my old life die. But the discourse tried to stop me as it kept playing in my head. I heard the voice of the too-good mother telling me I had failed at marriage and mothering. I was going to be the dreaded and dysfunctional divorced and single mom. The mask was slipping and people could see part of my unhappiness, my discontent, my inability to cope and to project competence. I felt like a failure.

The tension was building between the normative discourse (the too-good mother) and the mother I really was. I allowed myself to begin to recognize my shadowy side and of course my kids couldn't help but see it. I could be bitchy and demanding but still fun. I could be a tyrant but I was beginning to ignore the mess, especially if I had made it. I was tired and grouchy, but I still cared and I would still listen. I was very busy, but I still stopped to hug. It was beginning to be okay to recognize my shadowy self, but it was difficult not to feel guilty about my inability at

times to project a stable and in-control mom. I was afraid I was probably damaging my children in some way.

The Third Task: Navigating in the Dark

In this part of the tale, the doll guides Vasalisa to the house of the Baba Yaga.

The tasks of this stage are

Consenting to venture into the locus of deep intuition (entering the forest), and beginning to experience the new and dangerous-feeling numen of being in one's intuitive power. Learning to develop sensitivity as regards direction to the mysterious unconscious and relying solely on one's inner senses. Learning the way back home to the Wild Mother (heeding the doll's directions). Learning to feed intuition (feeding the doll). Letting the frail know-nothing maiden die even more. Shifting power to the doll (intuition) [italics in original]. (p. 88)

According to Estes (1992), “the doll represents the inner spirit of us as women [and mothers]; the voice of inner reason, inner knowing and inner consciousness” (p. 88). It represents the mother without her mask. I walked into the forest. I walked into the unknown and moved to the city. I trusted my intuition, but I was terrified. My children walked beside me as we entered a new world that was strange and unfamiliar-- strange but not ominous, unfamiliar but not oppressive. The unfamiliarity of city life, of new schools for my children, of university classes for me and of a new home was daunting, but there was a sense of control over our lives that I had rarely felt on the farm. Although the city felt like a strange land, it was also exciting to think about the possibilities that might lie ahead. There was hope.

I was hopeful that I could make changes and do things differently. I was no longer content to let things be, to support the status quo. I was willing to challenge that which did not fit for my family. I began to move more confidently. I did what I needed to do to protect and support my children. I sought out legal counsel. I bought a home and enrolled my children in school after careful research into the resources and supports available at different neighborhood schools. I enrolled in university. I registered my children in sporting activities and became a rink mom and a taxi driver. When they were asleep at night, I did my schoolwork, studying and writing papers. On the weekends, I often worked as a registered nurse. It was never easy, but we did it together. We all had our responsibilities, and I began to let the too-good mother slide: to give myself some space and not be so hard on myself as a mom. I began to trust my own knowing to make other decisions that were important to the future of my family. I had decisions to make about the practical aspects of living in a new home and a new locale. I had decisions to make about the divorce proceedings, and I had many decisions to make regarding mothering and raising two young teenagers and a child with special needs. Trust was a big part of that. I not only began to trust my ability to parent but I also began to trust my children and their ability to make their own decisions. Parenting was demanding at times, but I enjoyed it . . . most of the time. I began to trust my instincts, my intuition and my ability to parent according to my own beliefs and values.

I needed to feed my knowing and intuition for it to survive and the best way to feed my knowing and intuition was to heed it, to listen very carefully to my inner soul voice, to begin to let it guide me at every turn in the road. I also began to trust who I was as a person. I began to accept my not-so-sweet self and I felt the need to wear the mask less often. I still had a long way

to go but I no longer felt powerless. I no longer had a need to have an immaculate home; sometimes we had “A&W” for supper and sometimes I stapled the hems on my children’s jeans.

However, the shame and self-blame continued to linger. I was still reluctant to tell people I was divorced if I didn’t have to. My children had glimpses, and sometimes a close up view, of my not-so-sweetness. I would get stressed when the computer didn’t cooperate, and I would mutter and swear as I tried to fix it. But most of all, I felt guilty for spending too much time on my studies and not being the kind of mom I thought I should be.

My fellow students probably saw me as a competent mom because I was still quite masterful at hiding my frustration and anxiety. However, there were other mothers in my circle of friends and student group. We would get together, go for coffee and mostly talk and connect. We talked about our courses, our professors, our lives, our struggles, and our relationships but mostly about our kids. Our stories would seep out because we were all feeling busy, frustrated, and guilty. We were quite sure we were all bad mothers. But we recognized in each other the too-good mother with the high and unreasonable expectations. We began to recognize the normative discourse for what it was: demanding and destructive. We eased each other’s guilt when we told our mother stories. Our mother stories were often sad but true, funny but comforting. The stories began to break the silence surrounding the mothering experience. We began very timidly and we were very careful to let the mask slip just a little bit; we began very cautiously to share how difficult mothering was, how we struggled to do it all and how we felt like the harder we tried the more we failed. But, most importantly, we began to share our “haggish” and ugly thoughts, feelings and behavior. Those things the normative discourse told us were bad and damaging to our children. We began to tell it like it was.

We were a generation of women who had started out accepting the discourse and trying to be good wives and good mothers. We each had a life circumstance that had turned us upside down. Some of us were separated or divorced, some were widowed, some had lost jobs and others had overcome amazing life issues such as addiction, abuse and loss of loved ones. We had all decided to return to university and further our education as we raised our children. We were not brought up to be feminists, yet we were never so aware of the feminist agenda and our pursuit of educational, economic and sexual equality as we were right then. We raised these issues in class. We challenged the university system and attempted to get support from student services and graduate studies. We argued with student loans and wrote our local, provincial and federal politicians. We were making a big noise about these issues, but we had been silent about our experience of mothering until now. This silence had perpetuated the normative and dominant discourse.

We recognized that, although patriarchy had been the origin of this discourse, it had been maintained by our silence as mothers and by the absence of our stories--the stories that expose the reality of our experience of mothering. As we told our stories we began to recognize how we were able to, and how we had already, used subversive strategies to resist the normative discourse of mothering and the institution of patriarchal motherhood. Most of us were single parents, and we recognized our approach to parenting was changing. We shared our lives with our children more openly. We talked about social injustice, racism, homophobia, and oppression. We taught our children to be responsible for their behavior and accountable for their choices. We engaged in more open and honest communication with our children and shared our ideas. And out of necessity we shared the workload at home with our children. In addition, we were students

together and shared some of the same experiences: unrealistic student workload and unreasonable teachers and professors. As mothers attempting to resist the discourse, we told each other our “hag” stories, but we also recognized our strengths and our challenges in those stories.

The Fourth Task: Facing the Wild Hag

In this part of the tale, Vasalisa meets the Baba Yaga face-to-face. The tasks of this stage are:

Being able to stand the face of the fearsome Wild Goddess without wavering (meeting up with the Baba Yaga). Familiarizing oneself with the arcane, the odd, and the

“otherness” of the wild (residing at Baba Yaga’s house for awhile). Taking some of her values into our lives, thereby becoming ourselves a little odd (eating her food).

Learning to face great power-- in others, and subsequently one’s own power. Letting the frail and too-sweet child die back even further [italics in original]. (p. 91)

My mask had been that of a calm, competent, organized and together mother. My persona had been flat, too normal, typical and boring. Now I lived in an “odd house” where there was still busyness but also messiness, tiredness, and short temperedness, along with cooking, cleaning, studying, dancing, laughing and singing. But there was mostly messiness, tiredness, responsibility, anxiety, worry and wonder. Eve said that over time she learned that when I was on a cleaning frenzy, I was usually stressed about something, especially when I began cleaning the toilets and polishing the mirrors with a vengeance. She also learned to ask me, “What’s bugging you?” when she saw this happening. I gradually let the “clean freak” die and we often jived in the kitchen and sang Elvis tunes. Occasionally, we sang opera, which Jordan absolutely hated, and it made Maggie whine and put her paws over her ears. It was an “odd house.”

I was still learning to stand and accept my wild side, the hag that ranted and raved and was afraid of her new-found power. And I still wanted to hide the divorce or my being a “divorced woman.” I still had difficulty accepting and admitting that this was my life now. The challenges of being a single parent and a single homeowner with all the responsibilities of both were daunting at times. I still wore the mask of the “in-control” mother and woman, but I often felt out of control. I realized that although this was the life I had chosen, it was still challenging. My inner knowing was aware that this was what I wanted and needed and my wild mother, the wild hag, realized that divorced hope was better than married anguish. But I still struggled. I had spent a long time leaning on the too-good mother. I had used the normative discourse of mothering as my guide.

I felt lost in “the forest” of single parenting, studying, managing and organizing all the components of a busy family life. I was in search of my lost fire, but it had been snuffed out for so long. I realized that perhaps I should have made this decision to walk into the forest, move away and find my fire much sooner, but I had been hiding behind the mask of competence and contentment. By waiting so long to move on and move forward, I had bruised not only myself but also my children. Although we lived in an “odd house” now, I think we had lived in a disruptive--almost sad--house on the farm the last few years. Estes (1992) speaks of the benefits of making this move sooner rather than later:

In most cases it appears that it is best to go when you are called (or pushed), when you have some semblance of being able to be nimble and resilient, than to hold back, resist, hold off, until the psychic forces come get you and drag you bloody and bruised through

it all anyway. Sometimes there is no option for poise. But when there is, it is less energy-consuming to take it.” (p.476)

I think I missed the signs that a move was needed. Not only a move to another location but also a moving on.

My husband and I had agreed to leave the farm if it did not show some sign of profitability after three years. This lack of profitability was my sign, and the guilt and shame for wanting to leave was my demise. Perhaps I (we) could have left then with some sense of poise. But we stayed and I had now, eventually and finally, moved on, bloody and bruised. I think I surprised everyone including myself. As I came to recognize, accept and expose my wild nature, everyone was surprised to see what lay behind the mask--in particular my soon to be ex-husband. I think his expectation was that I would lie down and die, not rise up and roar. This woman I became, this woman who prepared for court, was not a sweet and caring woman. She was thoughtful, calculating, determined, astute, aware, suspicious and organized. She took all things into account. She attempted to protect herself and her children, and her fangs would show when she or her children were threatened. There was a dissonance between this woman with the spark and beginnings of a fire and the woman I had been down on the farm. The too-good mother kept butting heads with the hag/the wild mother. I struggled and second-guessed myself constantly. I continued to ask myself questions that I couldn't answer. Was I being mean when I insisted on my share of the farm? Was I being unreasonable when I asked for spousal support to continue my education? Was I being cruel when I insisted upon adequate child support? Was I being an uncaring mom when I asked my children to get the groceries and do their own laundry? Was my frustration and anger too ugly? Was I being selfish when I wanted time to myself? Was I

damaging my children by shirking my responsibilities as a mother according to the discourse I had been attuned to for so long?

The Fifth Task: Serving the Nonrational

In this part of the tale, Vasalisa asks Baba Yaga for fire and the Baba Yaga agrees to give her fire if Vasalisa will do some household chores for her. The tasks of this stage are

Staying with the Hag Goddess; acclimating to the great wildish powers of the feminine psyche. Coming to recognize her (your) power and the power and the powers of inner purification; unsoiling, sorting, nourishing, building energy and ideas (washing the Yaga's clothes, cooking for her, cleaning her house, and sorting out the elements) [italics in original]. (p. 94)

“Baba Yaga is the model for being true to the Self . . . In the tale, she teaches Vasalisa how to take care of the psychic house of the wild feminine” (p. 95). Laundering clothes and renewal of the cloth represent a cleansing and purification of our inner voice--our wild mother, the hag. Until I left the farm, I had been protecting and maintaining my too-good mother and had been ignoring my wild mother. I had let others see and know only what I wanted them to know about me. I had worn the mask of mothering quite diligently, and I had never stopped to assess whether it fit or not.

I began to understand that I was not the person I wanted to be. By washing and cleansing my view of self, I began to understand how it had been constructed, where my patterns of interaction had evolved from and what I needed to do to sort and mend my life experiences and renew my fire. I came to realize that my keeping of secrets had a history. I had learned the importance of keeping difficult secrets to maintain calmness and normalcy. My mom had learned

to keep secrets in order to protect her mother and I in turn had learned to keep secrets. My mom was an intensive and sacrificial mother. She gave of herself for her children and her husband. She portrayed contentedness, even-temperedness, calmness and stability. She taught me how to wear the mask well, and she also taught me the importance and value of mothering with love and understanding.

When I read the feminist literature on mothering (Dally, 1982; Green, 2004; Rich, 1979; Thurer, 1994; Wearing, 1984), it speaks to the importance of “other mothering” when we are unable to do it all ourselves. My mom was not only a grandmother but also an other mother for my children. Perhaps they would not have survived, thrived and shown such resilience if they had not received all that love and calmness, and all those cookies, from my mom. I remember dropping the kids off at her place on my way to work and wanting to be that person who stayed home with my kids but also wanting a career. I began to understand that my support for and adoption of the normative discourse had gotten in the way of searching for new experiences and developing my creativity. It had made me feel guilty, ashamed and blamed for all that had gone wrong, or contrary to the norm, in my life.

Vasalisa’s next task was to sweep the hut (to clear and clean the psyche). I had kept my external environment clear of debris, dirt, dust, weeds and clutter, but my internal environment, my psyche, was a mess. I needed to clear my head, to make room to do the work of learning, growing, completing my projects and fulfilling my ideas and dreams. I wanted to begin to nourish and develop those ideas that others had thought unattainable, unusual and uncommon. I wanted to be a therapist, still a nurse but also a therapist: a nurse-therapist. I wanted to return to university to accomplish this goal, this dream.

Vasalisa is also required to cook for the Baba Yaga. This cooking requires a fire--a fire that burns with heat, passion, words, ideas, and desire for what the self truly loves. My passion was for my children, my studies and my soulful self. I attempted to keep a consistent fire under those things I cared for most. I watched them carefully, I added fuel when needed, and I attempted to nurture and sustain my fire and my desire to create a better life for myself and my children. My commitment to my studies and my work nourished my wild soul. I became more confident. I began to fulfill my thoughts, my yearnings, and my longings. By trusting my wild mother, I was gradually “learning to sort, understand, keep in order, and clear and clean” (p. 97) my sense of self. I was able to remember my values and beliefs and renew a commitment to them. I was also able to recognize how I was feeling and why. I was beginning to understand the relationship between what I thought I should be and what I really was. I began to make sense of what the mask was hiding and what my secrets were about.

The dissonance between the good mother and the hag was still there, however. It was difficult to just let the too-good mother go. She had facilitated my acceptance by many others and I was concerned that I might lose their approval. I was afraid that the hag might scare away those who were unfamiliar with her. I continued to oscillate between the two. And in between were my multiple selves. I seemed to play one role at a time and I was unable to integrate my multiple selves into a whole being. I wore different expressions on the mask to hide what lay behind. I compartmentalized when my struggles became too heavy. I dissociated when trauma struck. I often thought of things I wanted to say or do but did neither and afterward I wished I had. I had found the wild hag, but I did not trust that she could guide me every step of the way. I

knew the too-good mom was more acceptable in the outer world and I still held on to her, at times, when I thought I needed her.

The Sixth Task: Separating This from That

In this part of the tale, Baba Yaga requires two very demanding tasks of Vasalisa. The tasks of this stage are

Learning fine discrimination, separating one thing from the other with finest discrimination, learning to make fine distinctions in judgment (sorting the mildewed corn from the good corn, and sorting the poppy seeds from a pile of dirt). Observing the power of the unconscious and how it works even when the ego is not aware (the pairs of hands which appear in the air). More learning about life (corn) and death (poppy seeds) [italics in original]. (p. 99)

The sorting spoken of in the tale is the kind that occurs when we face a trauma, dilemma or question, but not much is forthcoming to help us solve it. Mildewed corn and poppy seeds are both considered to hold hallucinogenic properties. In this tale, they represent medicines for the mind: “some nourish, others put to rest, some cause languor, others stimulate” (p. 100). We are also challenged to sort out the difference between things of kind and between medicines

I was beginning to find and trust my inner self, and I felt a degree of satisfaction and contentment in my life. I relaxed, and my child was brutally harmed, not once but twice. When Jordan disclosed and when he was in the motor vehicle accident, I didn’t know what to do. I could talk about the accident and ask for support, assistance and advice but when he disclosed his abuse, I closed up. I didn’t know what to do or who to talk to. I wasn’t sure our family would survive. I didn’t know what medicine we needed. I lost myself and my intuition once again. I

was able to care for Jordan, at least to go through the motions of care, but I didn't let myself feel the full impact of his disclosure for fear of collapse and disintegration. I regressed to the too-good mother. I did not rant and rave. My fury and rage did not show. I buried my anger and rage so deep that it never surfaced. I wore the mask well again.

Many people did not know what had happened to Jordan and what I was dealing with on a daily basis. It was a secret. I put it away. I packed it in a big box, and I buried the box in the ground. I told people who were close to me--immediate family and close friends--what was in the box, but we never opened the box to look inside and we never unpacked the box. We knew the box was there, but no one talked about it. I would mention the box on occasion, but it was clear no one wanted to dig it up and they especially didn't want to open it up. And so it remained buried but never forgotten. I lived by the normative discourse and kept silent, but I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with that. My too-good mother had served me well in the midst of the trauma but my wild mother, my escort and teacher, my fierce and demanding mother, was insisting upon being heard as she began shaking the box loose from the ground.

I began listening to my wild mother, my Baba Yaga. I began to sort it out. I began to recognize the power of my unconscious mind. My instincts and intuition came out of the fog. The secret began to creep out of Pandora's Box. The normative discourse sat on the lid, forcing it shut and trying desperately to confine the secret in an appropriate place. I could feel the weight of the lid, and I understood very clearly how important it was to keep the lid tightly sealed, but my wild mother, my inner voice, was telling me it was time to open the lid slowly; it was time to tell. I saw the golden hair growing, which encouraged me to tell a very difficult story understanding fully how difficult it would be for others to hear it as well.

The mask was slipping and the sadness and anger were starting to show. Tomasulo's chair lifted the lid ever so slightly. My writing has propped the lid open. My readers, thus far, have peered into the box and have shivered and wept. They have laughed and cried. They see what is inside, and they are not afraid. I gently pull the stories out. I hold the secrets close and secure. I protect their vulnerability. I begin to look at the stories and secrets more closely. I examine them. I attempt to understand them. I unravel and unpack. I slowly release my grip on them. I am surprised at how much lighter they feel. I want to toss them upward and let them go. But letting go always sounds easier than it really is. I want to tell my stories, but I am still reluctant to share my secrets.

The Seventh Task: Asking the Mysteries

In this part of the tale, Vasalisa successfully accomplishes her tasks and asks the Baba Yaga some good questions. The tasks of this stage are

Questioning and trying to learn more about the Life/Death/Life nature and how it functions (Vasalisa asks about the horsemen). Learning the truth about being able to understand all the elements of the wild nature (to know too much can make one old too soon [italics in original]. (p. 101)

According to Estes (1992), "We all begin with the question, 'What am I really? What is my work here?' " (p. 101). My work is the infusion of soul fire into my stories, my ideas, my life and others' lives. It is to shine a bright light on the normative discourse of mothering so I, and others, may see it more clearly and understand it for what it is. My work is to tell the stories that disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. My work is to open the box and shine a light onto the

secrets of mothering, not to expose all the secrets but to bring the existence of some of my secrets of mothering into the light--and make sense of their existence.

Vasalisa asks the Baba Yaga about the black, red and white horsemen. Each color has a life and death nature. Black is the color of death and darkness. But it is also the color of mud, the fertile, from which all ideas are sown: "Black is a promise that you will soon know something you did not know before" (p.102). Red is the color of rage and murder, but it is also the color of vibrant life: "Red is the promise that a rising up or burning is soon to come" (p. 103). White is the color of death when life has lost its color and rosiness, but it is also the color of the new and pure: "White is the promise that there is nourishment enough for things to begin anew" (p. 103). Vasalisa's life is renewed through the doll and the Baba Yaga, and her too-good mother and stepfamily die: "So this letting live, letting die is very important." (p. 103)

Yet it is very difficult for me to let things die. As Estes (1992) indicates, "For most women, to let die is not against their natures, it is only against their training" (p. 114). I did not want my marriage to die, and I hung on too long. I did not want my image of a good mother and good wife to die, and I held the mask too tight. I could not let my image of the impure illegitimate mom die. I could not let my shame about being an illegitimate mom, a divorced mom and an unprotective mom die. I held the secrets close and I kept them alive. My intuition went unheeded and ignored. My ability and creativity were stifled. But does one identity of mothering have to die before the other can live? Or do the too-good mother and the wild mother co-exist in all mothers? Does the darkness co-exist with the light? Is it more about the multiplicity and complexity of mothering?

There is blackness and darkness in mothering, but there is also light and a promise that we will learn and grow. There is redness and rage in mothering, but there is also vibrant life and a promise of birth and new life. There is whiteness and a lack of rosiness in mothering, but there is also newness and a promise of new beginnings. Mothering is complex and perhaps we need to move away from dichotomies that situate mothering in spaces that are either good or bad. Mothering can embrace complexity and focus on multiple issues and experiences. While mothering can be oppressive, it can also be empowering. While it is an individual experience, it is also affected by broader systemic, cultural and societal issues. How are our secrets of mothering affected by these same issues and by the dominant discourse? How is the sharing of our secrets more than an individual choice? How is our decision to tell based on the normative discourse of mothering, on cultural and societal influences, and on the expected consequences of telling?

It is good to ask questions to understand mothering, but knowing too much too soon makes us old. We acquire our wisdom slowly. We learn as we go--some more quickly than others. We also beat ourselves up when we know too much, especially when we think we should have known better. We can not judge our behavior of yesterday with the wisdom we have today.

The Eighth Task: Standing on All Fours

Baba Yaga is repelled by Vasalisa's blessing from her dead mother and gives Vasalisa light, a fiery skull on a stick, and tells her to go. The tasks for this stage are

Taking on immense power to see and affect others (receiving the skull). Looking at one's life situations in this new light (finding the way back to the old stepfamily) [italics in original]. (p.104)

A deepened sense of self--the wild mother/hag--lives in the underworld. The too-good mother lives in the topside world, the outer world of the discourse on mothering. However, “although sweetness can fit into the wild, the wild cannot long fit into sweetness” (p. 105). My deepening sense of self enables me to see my stories in a brighter light, through a new lens and with more perspective. I now question circumstances, situations and other people’s intents. I no longer accept without question. I have some distance from the sweetness of the discourse and I look closer; I peer at the normative discourse of mothering. I squint at it and roll it over it, examine it and attempt to shake it and pull it apart. I question its purpose. Whose discourse is this? Who does this discourse serve?

I am gaining knowledge and understanding about the discourse and am moving forward slowly but more surely. I am beginning to understand the motives, ideas, actions, and words of others and myself. I am listening to my intuition and I am taking risks. I let my stories out and I shine a light on them for others to see knowing that, although this has been a personal journey for me, other mothers have been silently journeying as well. Our silence has kept us apart. Most often, it has kept us from connecting and sharing. We all live in a society that encourages and perpetuates the normative discourse of mothering, that keeps us doubting ourselves and our abilities, that encourages us to hide behind our masks and keep our secrets.

I am choosing to leave the protection of the too-good mother. I have experienced turmoil and trauma and learned from it. I will deal with these struggles and devastating life events differently in the future. I will trust my intuition to react in ways that do not fit the normative discourse, the too-good mother. I will meet these life situations as the wild mother rather than the too-good mother. My fangs will show when I need to protect myself and my children, to prevent

harm and to promote our safety, health and happiness. Eve often teases me about times when she has seen my fangs emerge. I am a wild hag when I sense my children are being threatened or treated unfairly. I did not show my fangs when Jordan disclosed. But they are starting to show now, and maybe telling my story is the beginning of reclaiming safety for my child and perhaps for other children.

As I tell my stories and uncover my secrets, I have come to recognize the power in my wild psyche. I stride, and as I stride I shake the normative discourse of mothering and drop it on its head. I hope that as I do that, you will feel the possibility of doing the same. But the discourse may survive, perhaps only slightly bruised and damaged, because it has the support of the outside societal world. I believe the most damage will come from the inside world, the power of the wild mother/hag, as each mother journeys out of silence to find and connect with other wild mothers in a space where we are confident to make changes and do things differently.

As I stride, I tell the secrets that for me need to be told to shed light on the shadows of my life. I have come to know that there is no good or bad mother but rather a too good mother and a wild mother and everything else in between. We are what we are, neither good nor bad. At times we nurture and at times we challenge. At times we are supportive and at times we are busy. At times we understand and at times we are baffled. At times we care for our children and at times we say, "Look after yourselves." We care but we're tired. We love but we are overwhelmed. The mask needs to be lowered. It is okay. We are good enough. We are the best we can be with what we know now, and we do the best we can with what we are given.

The Ninth Task: Recasting the Shadow

In this part of the tale, Vasalisa journeys toward home with the fiery skull. She almost throws it away but the doll reassures her. Once back home, the skull watches the stepsisters and the stepmother and burns them to cinders. The tasks of this stage are

Using one's acute vision (fiery eyes) to recognize and react to the negative shadow of one's own psyche and/or negative aspects of persons and events in the outer world.

Recasting the negative shadows in one's psyche with hag-fire (the wicked stepfamily which formerly tortured Vasalisa is turned to cinders) [italics in original]. (p.107)

I am now able to carry the blaze of knowing. I aspire to hear, see, and understand in a different way. And I, like Vasalisa, am afraid of this new sight and new-found power. It may be easier and safer not to know, not to see. This new vision, this deeper intuition, acts like a “perpetual reconnaissance” (p.108), a sense of what lies ahead. But with this new sense comes the realization that it now requires work to do something about what I know and what I see. I must work to watch, comprehend and understand that which I sense. I then need to gather my strength and courage to do something about the imbalance, the injustice, the inability to let die and the need for new life; to do something about a normative discourse that denies the experience of mothering; to do something to support single mothers, divorced mothers, illegitimate mothers; to do something about childhood sexual abuse particularly as it is related to children with developmental disabilities. It would be easier not to see the dark side of our society, of others and of myself. It would be easier

to throw away the light and go to sleep. It is true, it is hard to hold the skull light out before us. For with it, we clearly see all sides of ourselves and others, both the disfigured and the divine and all the conditions in between. (p. 108)

It is painful to know and it is painful to remember. It is painful for me to know things about myself, others and the world we live in. If we, as mothers, watch the normative discourse intensely, if we constantly peer at it, can we burn it to cinders? If we constantly peer and examine abuse and maltreatment, can we begin to start a flame and eventually burn it to cinders as well? It will take careful and intense watching:

This penetrating light can differentiate layers of personality, intention, and motives in others (and ourselves). It can determine consciousness and unconsciousness in self and others. It is the wand of knowing. It is the mirror in which all things are sensed. It is the deep wild nature. (p. 108)

These knowings are painful and difficult to face. I can recognize a society that continues to be ignorant and silent. I can recognize the actions of myself, and others, as betrayal, deception, dislike, envy and jealousy. I recognize my ex-husband's behaviour as the overwhelming betrayal and deception that it was. I recognize my lack of insight and strength to make a better life for myself and for my children. I recognize my own jealousy and envy of those who have established close, intimate and supportive relationships. I recognize those who are envious of my success and those who dislike me for who I am. But the things that have oppressed me have limited power now, similar to Vasalisa's stepfamily who were unable to find fire in her absence. Vasalisa only realizes her power upon her return home. Those things that robbed me of my creativity, those things and people who said I couldn't do it, have lost their power. I can also lose

those negative aspects of myself with constant watching. I can learn to heed my intuition. I can learn to let the negative voices go. I can learn to listen to the voice of my inner wild mother. I can also surround myself with people who care about me, my work and my life. I can learn to challenge the normative discourse of mothering and academia. I can learn to challenge a society that decides for mothers how they are supposed to think, feel and behave.

As mothers we deserve an opportunity to ask ourselves what we really want. We deserve an opportunity to differentiate between “what [it is] that beckons us and things that call from our souls” (p. 111). As Estes (1992) describes, we need **not** make our decisions based on life seen as a smorgasbord. When we view life as a smorgasbord, we choose what is in front of us rather than seeking out what may not be readily available. We need to search out what we hunger for, what we long for, what we wish for, crave, desire and yearn:

This discrimination which Vasalisa learns as she separates poppy seeds from dirt and mildewed corn from fresh corn, is one of the most difficult things to learn, for it takes spirit, will, and soulfulness and it often means holding out for what one wants” (p. 111).

As mothers, we want to learn to discriminate. We want to live in a society that educates and gives us room to discriminate. This discrimination, this pursuit, strengthens our intuition, strengthens our real selves and begins to remove the mask of mothering. We learn to trust our judgment. We are not afraid to pursue what we want, so the normative discourse of mothering loses its power over us. We recognize and accept our own opinions, thoughts, ideas, values, morals, and ideals. We begin to recognize that the good or bad mother is what **we create** based on the normative discourse, based on outside forces and messages rather than our inner wild mother: “There is very little right/wrong or good/bad in this world. There is, however, useful and

not useful” (p. 112). It is not useful to hang on to the discourse. The normative discourse promotes guilt, shame and mother-blame. The normative discourse does not encourage us to trust our intuition and our mothering instincts. The too-good mother often promotes silence. As Estes (1992) states:

The wild mother is very different from the too-good mother. The wild mother guides us, bursts with pride over our accomplishments. She is critical of blockages around our creative, sensual, spiritual, and intellectual life. Her purpose is to help us, to care about our art, and to reattach us to the wildish instincts. She guides the restoration of the intuitive life. She is thrilled when we make contact with the doll, proud when we find the Baba Yaga, and rejoices when we she sees us coming back with the fiery skull held out before us. (p. 113)

Trusting our own inner wild mother, the hag, leads us to a place where the discourse, the mask of mothering and the secrets of mothering no longer dictate our thoughts, feelings and behavior. We are able to follow our knowing (p. 114).

It is difficult to let the voice of the normative discourse, which we have listened to for so long, die. But what must die eventually dies. The discourse is strong, it is enduring, it argues, it makes us feel guilty; it pulls at our resistance and causes doubt. It causes us shame and mother-blame. It saps our creativity. And perhaps it stifles not only us as mothers but also our children. We as women and mothers know when it is time for life and time for death. We need to trust. We need to tell our stories and share some of our secrets. The connecting of wild mothers, and the re-creating of mothering, will give us power. It will give us hope and possibility. It will make us

strong and it will join us with each other and with our wild mother, the mother who rejoices when we recognize, know and appreciate ourselves for who we are and who we will become.

Reclaiming Mothering

The journey to motherhood is an odyssey of epic proportions, and every woman who undertakes it is a hero. Celebrating our role at the very core of humanity means learning to sing every line of that epic freely, the lamentations along with the hymns. When the masks of motherhood do crack through, they will have been eroded by tears that have been shed and shared, by the tremor of secrets unclasped, by the booming laughter of relief. What lies beneath the brave and brittle face of motherhood is a countenance of infinite expressiveness, a body of deepest knowing.

Susan Maushart (1999, pp. 246-247)

It is ten years since Susan Maushart wrote those words. It is almost fifty years since Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* identified the identity crisis in women's lives and the discrepancy between the expectation and the experience of being a woman and mother. Perhaps Friedan produced a small fracture line in the mask of mothering at that time, shedding light on an issue that had not even been recognized never mind talked about. Over three decades have passed since Adrienne Rich wrote that the masks of motherhood were cracking through in her groundbreaking book *Of Woman Born*. Rich pushed the norms and normative discourse around mothering and wrote meaningfully about motherhood as experience and institution. She widened the fissure that Friedan had produced and let more light enter. However, she maintained that unmasking motherhood would be no easy task, and she challenged us to consider that perhaps motherhood is **our** problem due to the silences we **choose** to maintain about our feelings, our experiences, and our thoughts about mothering.

I do not believe, though, that changing mothering is as simple as making a choice. As mothers, we do not journey in a void, in a barren land by ourselves unless we continue to wear

the mask that isolates us from each other. We can not look at our journey without also looking at the context in which we make that journey. The normative discourse is that context.

I hope my stories make apparent how unhealthy the discourse surrounding mothering is, but simply walking away from it is difficult and somewhat frightening. To change the dominant discourse means to unmask, and unmasking means vulnerability. It means we are naked with all our beauty and ugliness. The possible consequence of abandoning the discourse is disconcerting. I wonder what we are most afraid of. Are we afraid of losing the sanctity of mothering? Do we think that it will be taken away from us if our real selves are revealed? Are we afraid of our own ugliness? Are we afraid to see what lies behind the mask? How does society contribute to this fear? How does the context of our broader worlds, as mothers, encourage us to question our real selves and question our perspectives of our experience of mothering? How does society silence us?

Society does not want us to remove our mask of mothering and perhaps that is why the mask has not been removed entirely and perhaps never will be. But there are definite cracks in the mask that many mothers and many others can see. Perhaps my personal stories have opened the fissure further and shed more light on what lies behind my mask and also on a discourse that keeps mothers apart. I wonder if the mask will ever crumble completely or if we will hang onto it, just in case. Currently, we use crazy glue to keep it together. We still wear it with its cracks and masking tape, and sometimes with pieces of the mask missing. We have not thrown it away, **yet**. Will we one day? If we reclaim mothering, will we no longer need our masks?

Mothering responsibilities have changed over time. We have gone from feeling empty to feeling too full (Maushart, 1999). The context of mothering has changed dramatically. Our roles

have changed, the content of what we do has changed and the reality of mothering has changed. But there is still a mismatch between how we think we should feel and how we really feel, what we think we should do and what we are able to do, what we believe we should think about mothering and what we really do think. Society's expectations of us and our expectations of ourselves still do not match our experience. The dominant discourse prevails, and it continues to influence the practice of mothering. We cannot change our experience of mothering, our practice of mothering, until we change how we see the discourse, how we think about it and how we may disturb it, shake it up, and set it on its ass. An emerging discourse may then begin to unravel the complexities of motherhood. It may begin to sort out the bipolar complexities that mothering is a site of oppression but also a location of joy; that although mothering is restrained by patriarchy it is still a site of empowerment; and that although mothering may sometimes be oppressive it can also be very liberating (Green, 2004). An emerging discourse may then disturb and examine both the oppressive and emancipating experiences of mothering.

I believe the place to begin this examination of mothering is by telling our stories. We begin by telling our secrets of mothering, by telling it like it is, by allowing others to see us as we really are--the beauty and the ugliness--by sharing our stories with each other, by accepting and refraining from judging each other, and by refraining from shaming and blaming ourselves. As mothers, we have a unique and unfathomable capacity to accept and love our children. What would happen if we extended this generosity to each other and to ourselves? What impact would sharing our stories have upon guilt, shame, blame, remorse, pleasure and joy? What impact would our stories have upon the dominant discourse in educational and health systems and the broader society?

As I reflect on my own discovery of self and my parallel journey from motherhood to mothering, I realize how important the discovery of self is. However, I also realize that this challenging task is not accomplished in isolation. It is best accomplished through connectedness and the sharing of personal stories. This allows us, as mothers, “to go beyond the myths that are generated by the dominant group culture transmitted [often] through the family, and internalized by the self” (Lerner, 1985, p. 223). Mothers have suffered with their anger, their frustration, their self-blame, their guilt, their shame, their grief and dissatisfaction, alone, and always wondering, “What is wrong with **me**?” Through connection, we are better able to challenge, resist, refute and interrupt a discourse that does not value, represent or empower mothers and mothering. It is not sufficient that we individually take our journey from motherhood to mothering: “If we do not also challenge and change the societal institutions that keep [mothers] in a subordinate and de-selfed position *outside* the home, what goes on *inside* [italics in original] the home will continue to be a problem for all [mothers]” (Lerner, 1985, p. 224).

I think again of the women who have promoted an empowered mothering experience. Adrienne Rich (1986) in *Of Woman Born* refers to motherhood as a patriarchal institution that is male-defined and controlled and is oppressive whereas mothering, she contends, refers to a female-defined, centered and empowering experience for women. Andrea O'Reilly (2004b), in her introduction to *From Motherhood to Mothering*, supports Rich's ideas and exploration of motherhood as institution and mothering as experience. Umansky (1996) identifies two competing views on motherhood: the negative discourse which focuses on motherhood as an oppressive institution and the positive discourse which describes motherhood (minus patriarchy)

as a liberating and empowering experience that creates bonds among mothers and a deeper understanding of self and a release of creativity and generativity.

I begin to realize that motherhood is not a natural or biological function but more specifically a cultural practice that changes in response to economic and societal factors. It is a cultural construct that varies with time and place and therefore can not be defined as a universal experience. However, I maintain that the majority of mothers, regardless of their economic or societal situation, are aware of the normative discourse of mothering in their own particular cultural context. Mothers know what the expectations of a good mother are regardless of where they live and regardless of their life circumstances. But mothers did not create or construct the predominant discourse surrounding mothering, and the discourse remains oppressive as mothers try to live out the expectations of the discourse.

Parenting books and women's magazines are jammed full of the expectations and values of the discourse. Sara Ruddick (1989) indicates that mothers are policed by the "gaze of others" (p. 111). We worry what other mothers will think; we worry about what our own mothers will think; we worry about what the neighbors will think; we worry about what our children's teachers will think and we worry about every eye that is upon us. We think, "Am I a good mother? Do I measure up?" Under this gaze, we relinquish our power and our beliefs and values as mothers. We lose our confidence because we know we are being judged. As Rock (2007) indicates, "[we] are regulated by the discourses of knowledge, [we] behave in ways deemed 'appropriate', [we] live in fear of being watched, seen, or exposed as something other than 'good'" (p. 21). Foucault (1979) calls this place of fear the "carceral continuum" and he suggests it makes us docile bodies as we come to know how we should act and behave. As docile bodies

we do not resist, rebel, question, or push back against the discourse. We do not tell or show how we really feel or what we are experiencing.

Individual stories allow us to make sense of our own worlds, and they also open up discussion related to larger issues. First person stories may influence others to examine their value system connected to issues related to mothering. My stories may be seen as a description and a strategy not only for self growth and change at an individual level but also for change in the conditions of dominance and oppression related to mothering at a societal level. I hope that you hear my stories and relate to my journey through my experiences of both pain and power, hopelessness and courage, how I lived and how I want to live (Zingaro, 2009). My stories may be seen as dangerous knowledge (Zingaro), but my stories may also “open up the beginnings of an ethical, moral questioning about the truths [about mothering] we have grown up with” (Zingaro, 2009, p. 175). There is hope and possibility in stories.

Although I tell my personal stories and reflect upon my journey from motherhood to mothering in hope that they will draw forth your own personal stories, I also hope we will all be challenged to work towards becoming effective agents of social change. The larger context of our lives as mothers--the social, the political, the societal, and the cultural contexts--will influence our construction and creation of a new discourse, a counter narrative. So, too, I hope will the reality of the experiences of mothering influence the formation of this counter narrative of mothering. It is then that we can begin to imagine what that discourse may look like and what the future may bring.

Recognition of the broader societal and cultural issues, along with the development of mother-centered counter narratives, will support and work alongside the discovery of selfhood

amongst mothers seeking to recreate mothering based on their experience, their values and their beliefs. Working towards an individual and societal disruption of the discourse may destabilize the patriarchal institution of motherhood enough to crack its foundation. Along with the crack in the foundation of patriarchal motherhood comes a further crack in the mask of mothering. As the foundation cracks, the necessity of the mask will begin to disappear. Our secrets of mothering will come forth and we will share our stories with each other. We will construct and create a counter narrative. We will find courage to connect and share a new story: “The courage to connect can be born in that moment when we dare to write our secrets into stories” (Poulus, 2009, p. 186). Listen closely to my stories but listen even more closely and carefully to your own stories. Share your stories. Share and compare your wounds, your battle scars, your triumphs and your healing. Voice your experiences. Break the silence. “In order to change what is, we need to give speech to what *has been*, to imagine together, what *might be*.” [italics in original] (Rich, 1979, p.260)

I reflect on Adrienne Rich’s (1986) words one last time:

What is astonishing, what can give us enormous hope and belief in a future in which the lives of women and children shall be mended and rewoven by women’s hands, is that we have managed to salvage, of ourselves, for our children, even within the destructiveness of the institution: the tenderness, the passion, the trust in our instincts, the evocation of a courage we did not know we owned, the detailed apprehension of another human existence, the full realization of the cost and precariousness of life. (p. 280)

How will I now move forward with hope, courage and possibility to continue to break the silence while mending and reweaving my life and perhaps the lives of others in the process?

VIII

MENDING THE PAST AND REWEAVING THE FUTURE

Perhaps we will find that place---that dwelling place where all that is meaningful comes together. That place where we find in our hearts, and in our lives, our ultimate concern.

Chris Poulos (2009, p. 197).

I have been fortunate and perhaps privileged to be able not only to live the experience of mothering but also to reflect upon the experience and write about it. It has not come without struggle, or a certain cost, but I cherish my opportunity to be a mother and I appreciate the support of the academic community while doing this work. Some would say I took a risk in doing this work but, because of the support and encouragement I received, I feel brave enough to write and publish my stories, brave enough to use my stories and secrets to guide my future research and projects and brave enough to tell my stories at conferences. I anticipate the dissemination of this work will be a very challenging and interesting process. A project and a number of conference presentations have already materialized during the completion of this work. I anticipate that further development of the current project will be an opportunity to be creative and adventurous.

An Interprofessional Community Development Project

Creating Safe Environments for Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities: Providing Sexual Health Educational Resources for Adolescents, Parents, and Teachers

I had always hoped that a project like this would evolve from my PhD dissertation work. It is happening now before completion of my dissertation, and it has in some ways delayed and decelerated the writing of my dissertation. But when opportunity knocks, we need to weigh the

advantages/disadvantages and make a decision. So I made the decision to apply for funding for a pilot project at a local high school. Following the pilot project, I received further funding to expand the project to other local high schools and, in fact, the demand for the project/program has far exceeded my teams' ability to deliver it.

I am looking out at fifteen accepting and eager faces, fifteen potentially very vulnerable adolescents, fifteen people I want to protect, and fifteen people I hope will learn to protect themselves against sexual abuse. I am also hoping it is not too late. The message is so important: "Talk (say NO), Walk (get away), and Squawk (tell someone you trust)." We are practicing the "NO," and they are saying it loudly and with conviction: "NO, don't do that," "NO, don't touch me," "NO, leave me alone," and "NO, I don't like that." They are saying it, but do they understand? How can I be sure to get the message across?

Today has been one of those days that I should have stayed in bed. What could go wrong did go wrong. I have been having many problems with the renovations of my home recently and the "Reno Monster" reared its ugly head first thing this morning; it was pouring rain and Jordan needed a ride to work; there was a crisis regarding our College's nursing strategy that required an emergency faculty meeting, and I needed to get to the school for a presentation this morning. I arrived at the school to find that the social work student who was to present today's session was a "no show." I should have pulled the covers over my head this morning and gone back to sleep. The teachers are disappointed; we are unable to locate the social work student, and there has been no phone call. We re-book the

session for a different day, and I reassure the teachers that I will be back to do the afternoon session.

When I arrive at my office, Eve is waiting for me. We had planned to complete the work we have been doing on a chapter related to "Risk to Self" for a British nursing text. Change of plans! I don't even ask Eve; I simply inform her that we will be doing the presentation at the school in the afternoon. She suggests we go to a movie; I suggest we begin to prepare. We spend the morning preparing and the afternoon presenting.

The room is noisy and the teachers remind the fifteen students to be quiet and respectful for the presentation. I am concerned about engaging them, but I am not sure why I worried. Eve is so full of energy and so enthusiastic. The students love her, and I love her too! Soon all my worries subside as the students watch and listen intently.

"Privacy is important. Does anyone know what privacy means?" Eve asks.

"It's mine," someone with a bouncy ponytail shouts out.

"Very good," I say, "Private can be a place, a time, a thought or a private part of our body." Everyone is nodding.

"So what is a private body part?" Eve inquires and there are a few giggles.

"Why do you think we sometimes laugh or giggle about the words 'private parts'?" I ask, prompting a few more giggles. But soon we are talking about the parts of our bodies that are covered by a bathing suit, and we name the parts including the mouth. There is much less

giggling now as we talk about why it is important to know the correct names for our body parts.

"Our bodies need to be treated with respect," says Eve, "and no one should make you do something with your mouth or your hands without you saying it is okay."

There are some questions about that and a young boy in the back with a very serious look on his face says, "I don't like it when the doctor touches my private parts. I am going to tell him it is not okay."

"It's okay to do that if you are uncomfortable. Can you talk to your mom about this?" I ask. He nods and we have a discussion about when it may be appropriate for someone to touch or look at our private parts.

"If you are unsure, just tell the person touching you that you are going to tell your mom or dad about the touching, and if that person says it is okay to tell, the touching is probably okay. But if they say don't tell your mom or dad, then the touching is probably not okay," I explain.

"It is never okay for someone to tell you to keep a secret about touching," says Eve, and they all nod in agreement.



This is the first of four sessions we will be spending with this group regarding sexual health education. We have already met with their teachers and parents to discuss the handling of possible disclosure and to also discuss the myths and stereotypes surrounding sexuality and children/adolescents with developmental disabilities.

The fourth session is the puppet show, and we are all looking forward to that but for now we reflect on the first session and hope we have connected with the participants.

I look at Eve and we smile at each other. I think the session has gone very well today and, although the students are anxious to chat some more, they are off to get the snacks ready.

I look at Eve again and she is laughing with one of the students. Eve is Jordan's sister and I wonder what thoughts go through her mind as she explains inappropriate touching. Does she think about Jordan? I think about him sometimes when I am presenting and it makes things so difficult that I try to separate. Eve says she can't think about it because it still makes her sick, but this work is very important to her and to me. We are both multiple selves when we present this program and that complexity is both a challenge for us and an asset to the program. We are passionate about this work, so we attempt to separate and integrate the mother, the sister, the daughter, the researcher, the nurse, the educator, and the student in order to offer the presentations in the most effective way possible, knowing that sometimes it may be difficult and sometimes it may not be possible.

We are invited to stay for cookies and juice with the teachers and students. The room is noisy again and above the noise I hear, "Don't touch me there; that is my private part; please don't do that." I look around and one of the teachers looks embarrassed and flustered. She says, "I was just brushing some cookie crumbs from the front of her shirt." The teacher turns to the student again and says, "Sorry Ursula, you are right."

I look at Eve, and she returns my glance knowingly. I guess we have been successful with at least one student today.

"Good job, Ursula," Eve says as she gives her a thumbs-up, and Ursula beams. The teacher nods and smiles as well. "Good job, Ursula," she says.

Eve and I arrive back at my office; it is time to go home and we are just starting to do the planned work of the day. I check my messages, and one message strikes panic in my heart. It is the usual check-in message from Jordan that he is home from work, he has his newspaper flyers loaded up, he is leaving to deliver, and he has his key. But the message is left from a phone number that is not our home. I don't recognize the number, and I hear a man speaking to Jordan as he goes to hang up, but I can not decipher what he is saying. I listen again. Now I am really in a panic. I replay it and have Eve listen. She searches the phone number on the net and has a name before I even know what she is doing. She does a reverse search in the phone book, but there is no address listed. I call the number but no answer. I leave a message indicating Jordan has called from this number and asking the unknown man to call me back. I leave to find Jordan, and Eve stays in my office to work just in case this man or Jordan calls back. This familiar panic returns. What if something is happening to him, AGAIN?!

I try to think of a logical answer about what has happened trying desperately not to panic, to just breathe. I know bad things can happen; past trauma always comes back to haunt you at times like this. I drive around his paper route; I can't find him; I go home just in

case I missed him. He is not home. I decide to drive his route just one more time, and as I pull out of the driveway, I see him coming down the street. I am so happy to see him, but as soon as I know he is alright, I am angry with him. Mothers are such odd creatures! I ask him whose house he was at. He says he wasn't at anybody's house. Now I am angry and he suddenly realizes that. I tell him how I know he was at someone else's home (rather than have him think that I really do have eyes in the back of my head). I calm down and I tell him I need to go do something, I will be back shortly and you will need to tell me what happened when I get back.

I come back, and he looks a little confused and forlorn. I feel bad, but I am still a little angry (still the odd creature). He explains that he forgot to phone me when he left the house and he didn't want to worry me, so rather than coming home, he asked to use the phone of one of the people on his route. He left the usual message, as if he were just leaving home, rather than telling me he was phoning from someone else's home because he knows he is not supposed to go into anyone's house on his paper route, and he knows I worry if I don't get that phone call. That was his solution to his dilemma. Mystery solved. I try to explain how that phone call worried me more than if he had just told me what he was doing. I talk a bit about the importance of telling the truth always, and after a very long pause, he decides that he has a few other truths he maybe should disclose: he had poutine for lunch and he asked a neighbor for a ride to work one day when he was running late. Two things he is not supposed to do but now he has told; now it is off his chest. He says it fast and then holds his breath. Secret confessions, why is it so hard to tell?

I give Jordan a ride to his work and I go back to my work once again. Eve thinks that trying to work on the chapter at this point is ridiculous. I agree. We decide to continue preparation for other sessions at the school, just in case. We are also doing the on-line training for the Red Cross C.A.R.E. kit (Challenge Abuse through Respect Education), which we are modifying for the presentations. We read about the statistics related to sexual abuse of children and youth; we read about offenders, abusers, and pedophiles. We read about the impact of sexual abuse on victims. We read victim stories; we see videos clips about Sheldon Kennedy and others telling their stories of their own sexual abuse. It honestly makes me sick and I have to separate. I have to leave it for now, all the emotion of the day, the reminders, the crazy-making, the worries and the questions. But one question still remains: "Why did they keep it a secret?"

Although we are having difficulty keeping up with the demands for presentations of this program in schools, we still continue to present at invited conferences. This always sparks more interest, but despite the time and financial restraints, we take it one step at a time and there will be new and ongoing options for funding. We keep moving forward.

It is one of those moments when all the stars are in alignment. I had no idea it would feel this way or look like this. The world feels as it should. Things are in place and for the moment all is well. I see myself from a distance and I smile, grin, laugh and embrace the moment. I am at peace. I had this feeling once on a vacation with my children. I had decided

to take Jordan to Disneyland and my other two (adult) children wondered why they weren't invited. I had no idea that they would want to go but was extremely happy that they wanted to join us. We booked our flights and a small two-bedroom suite. We arrived at the hotel fairly late and were anxious for bed after a long day in airplanes, airports and taxis. I crawled into bed and felt this same peaceful feeling. So often I fall asleep in a hotel room wondering how my children are doing at home and if they are okay, but that night I knew they were safe and sound and close at hand. I relaxed and drifted off to sleep looking forward to the days ahead.

I have this same feeling today. I am presenting at a local conference. My student nurses and my daughter Eve are part of the presentation: "Providing safe environments for adolescents with developmental disabilities: Providing sexual health education to students, their parents, and teachers." Part of the presentation involves a demonstration of the puppet show that is part of the resources we are providing to schools to support the education of adolescents with developmental disabilities regarding sexual health. I have asked my son, McLeay, to film the presentation because we want to use it to encourage other students to be involved in the project and in clinical practice specific to schools and vulnerable populations. Jordan was out celebrating his big brother's birthday the night before and had a sleepover with him, so he is sitting in the audience as well. (I'm sure this is the last place they all want to be.) But I look at the three of them and realize again that the world is as it should be for this moment.

The presentation goes well, and I am so proud of my students. They are so articulate in explaining the project and their experience during clinical practice in schools. There has been so much interest in this project and the demand for the educational sessions has far exceeded our ability to provide the sessions. In this moment, I savor the project's success, the enthusiasm of my students and the presence of my children.

On the drive home with Jordan I begin to wonder what his reaction to the presentation was.

"What did you think of the presentation Jordan?" I ask him.

"I really liked the puppet show," he says.

The puppet show is about two adolescents' disclosure of sexual abuse.

"What did you think about the story?" I inquire.

He replies, "It probably made you think about Mr. A (Jordan's alleged perpetrator), didn't it?"

"Is that what you thought about Jordan?" I ask him.

He looks at me and responds, "Ya, I did. Why didn't you tell them about Mr. A?"

I hesitate for a minute and respond, "That is a very good question Jordan. I have been asking myself that very question, and I am trying to answer that question by writing my dissertation."

"I hate that dissertation. When are you going to get out of the dungeon?" he retorts.

I laugh, but he's right; it is taking a long time. "How would you feel if I told people what happened to you? What Mr. A did?" I ask.

"I think you should. I don't want to tell anybody, but I think you should. Next time you do a presentation like that, tell them what happened to me and tell them about Mr. A," he insists.

And maybe I will.

Writing My Secrets into Poems

I am interested in poetry although I must admit I have never written poetry previously. Both the form and the content of poetry moves me (and I believe others) emotionally, and I may be able to do some things more effectively with poetry than I can with prose. Narrative tells more of an unfolding and continuous story than most lyrical poetry. A reader is more likely to be reflexively aware of how they are interpreting poetry (Richardson, 2002). Poetry challenges canonical social science discourse and has the potential to transform us personally and open up our research practices, while at the same teaching us about injustice and encouraging us to join in the struggle (Richardson, 2002). Poetry may also make us aware of the hidden political agendas regarding how we do research (Richardson, 2002) and poetry is beginning to be published in such journals as *American Anthropologist* (and other anthropology journals) and *Qualitative Inquiry*. I read about this, and I try to write a poem about my experience. It is my first poem...a poem to Jordan.

I walk but I don't move forward.....

I talk but I don't connect...

I care but I'm numb.....

I sleep but I don't rest.....

I eat but I don't taste, and

...I think but I don't comprehend.

I work but only because I can separate.

I play but only because I can forget...briefly.

I hug and my arms are warm and embracing ...but I am cold inside.

...I wanted to protect you forever...

I have failed

And I am sorry.

BLM

Performing Autoethnography

There is now a proliferation of personal narrative in performance studies. *The Laramie Project* about the killing of Matthew Shepard is a good example of an ethnographic performance by a professional New York Team (Kaufman, 2001). *The Vagina Monologues* is another example (Ensler, 1998). The performers invite others to understand issues or topics that have been silenced. Performance of personal narrative makes hidden issues visible and in doing so opens up the possibility of cultural transformation. It provides a space for a discussion of trauma, disease, and oppression. In that way, it is political.

Performers do not try to speak for a community but instead are engaged in shared conversations in which they speak to and with a community. The stage becomes a forum for ongoing and open dialogue that involves the text, performers, and audience. Performance is not so much representational as it is dialogical and conversational (Denzin, 2003). A performance of personal narrative doesn't skirt representational issues: it complicates them. Performance is immediate, passionate, and emotional. It evokes empathy. There is no place to hide and little distance exists between the performers and their roles, or the performers and the audience, as might exist in fiction or poetry.

Performance emphasizes personal narrative as emergent, situated, and reflexive rather than as an autonomous, stable text. In performance, we can see the power of restorying ourselves. We can rename experience, making performance a transgressive act (Spry, 1997). Denzin (2003) states that a good performance text must be more than cathartic; it must be political, moving people to action and reflection. Performance can lead to moral and political issues becoming discussable. Performance of personal narrative encourages us to be critical and appreciative and to bear witness to personal suffering and lived experience (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2000). More and more interdisciplinary ethnographers approach performance as the method of their research.

It is my hope to make a video or theatrical production to promote healthy sexuality and healthy peer relationships and to address bullying and harassment issues related to children and adolescents with developmental disabilities. It could also be very useful as a teaching tool for a number of professionals (teachers, nurses, psychologists for example) and for students, and also for non-professionals (support workers, parents for example) and the public. More importantly,

the production may challenge assumptions about people with developmental disabilities and may prompt a change in social practice and policy. Perhaps an interactive presentation with school and community professionals would be useful and exciting, or a presentation or drama to stimulate discussion and options for change, prevention, and intervention regarding childhood sexual abuse and other issues. And perhaps puppetry and drama would be part of that. There are so many possibilities.

I think it would be interesting to try to write a script or to have a screenwriter produce a script from my stories and secrets of mothering. It may be a way to make a connection between the personal and the social; the public and the private. A connection between the secrets of mothering and the way mothers are valued, represented, and empowered in our society and culture. Change requires doing things in a different way, being daring and creative and delivering a message in multiple and complex ways.

IMAGES OF A PROCESS



I

REFLECTIONS ON BECOMING AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHER

As an autoethnographer, I am both the author and the focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller.

Carolyn Ellis (2009, p. 13)

I consistently asked myself the same questions over and over as I wrote this dissertation: “What does an autoethnographic dissertation look like? Is this a scholarly piece of work? Does this research contribute to and expand upon the current body of knowledge and literature? Does this work contribute to the betterment of society? Does this work, using this methodology, represent the quality necessary for a PhD – and does it add something another methodological approach can not?” We discussed these questions on an ongoing basis when I met with my supervisors, Dr. Pat Renihan and Dr. Debbie Pushor. Using an article on methodological considerations Debbie had co-authored (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007), we had conversations about the justification of the dissertation (the personal, the practical and the social), the need to name the phenomenon being studied, the particular methods, analysis and interpretation, important and relevant literature, the uniqueness and contributions of autoethnography (a/e) to this particular study, ethical considerations, representation, authenticity, plausibility, adequacy, resonance and the social and political significance of the study.

I reflect on the depth and breadth of what I have learned during my doctoral studies, and I am truly amazed. When I began my program in Education Administration, I was hoping to study, to learn more about, and to develop mental health services in schools to address the needs of adolescents, in particular, suicidal adolescents. I had already accomplished some work in this

area. However, during a qualitative research methodology class, I became interested in autoethnography (a/e)--and the rest is history. It is said that a/e chooses you rather than you choosing a/e and I believe that to be true. I read Carolyn Ellis' work and I was hooked. I went to speak to my professor, Dr. Sam Robinson, about this methodology.

We are sitting in class as usual, the seven of us, our PhD cohort. I am totally absorbed in the class and talk incessantly about Carolyn Ellis and autoethnography. A few people are interested, but the remainder looks at me with doubt. Dr. Robinson probably realizes I am monopolizing class and he suggests we continue our discussion after class. I am happy with that. After class I take the books and articles I have been reading to the front to show Dr. Robinson. He seems amused at my enthusiasm. I finally ask him the question that has been haunting me, "Do you think I could use a/e as my methodology for my dissertation?"

He is silent for what seems an eternity. I am thinking it is a dumb question and perhaps I shouldn't have asked it.

He thoughtfully replies, "It would not be easy Lee, but it is not impossible. You may have a difficult time to find someone who is familiar enough with your methodology to support and supervise this work."

"But if I found someone then I could?" I inquire.

He smiles and nods, "A/e is at the far end of qualitative research. You would definitely be swimming in the river and perhaps Education Administration will have some difficulty with the methodology you are proposing."

"I know what you mean by swimming in the river. I would be in the river with the participants not on the shore watching and observing them. I would be the only participant and therefore in the river alone," I respond.

"That is correct," he replies and nods again.

"But if I could find support for this methodology, if I could convince them of its merit and my desire to do this, then it would be possible?" I persist.

"Yes perhaps, but you may have a very difficult time receiving ethical approval," he insists.

I think about this with no real understanding of the wisdom of those words.

I feel somewhat deflated but he adds, "First you have to see if you are able to write this way. Not everyone can write in a novelistic/story style. Why don't you write an autoethnographical piece for this class? Then you will know."

And so I do. Dr. Robinson reads my work; he believes I am capable of doing autoethnographic writing and encourages me to pursue this methodology while still keeping in mind all the possible challenges. I am very intrigued now because I really didn't know I could write this way until now.

The first autoethnographic narrative I wrote was about Jordan's traumatic injury following a motor vehicle/pedestrian accident. I sat at my computer and tried to take myself back to the moment, back to that day and write from that place in time as I remembered it. I told the story in the present tense as I remembered it from my perspective. My heart pounded as I wrote

the story, and one reader told me later how her heart pounded as she read the story. I then related the story to the literature on the positive and negative effects of trauma and this led me to the literature on relationships.

This search and writing provided a new understanding and perspective of the experience. For example, I remember some of my writing and the discoveries in the literature that made me think of the experience of Jordan's accident in a different way. I discussed the literature first and then my interpretations of the literature related to my story and my own personal experience. I used italics to reflect my own voice. The following is an example of that writing and my reflections on it.



Trauma somehow gives us a new-found appreciation of others, self, and life in general (Janoff-Bulman & Berger, 2000). It is ironic in the aftermath of trauma, when the world is the most meaningless, that another type of meaning-making takes hold. According to Janoff-Bulman & Frantz (1997), there are two different understandings of meaning: meaning as comprehensibility and meaning as significance. It is this meaning as comprehensibility that gets shattered when we are traumatized; the outcome does not make sense and we realize we are vulnerable. Yet in the face of this new awareness, we create a new meaning of life. We engage in a re-valuation of our lives and in doing so experience a new-found sense of appreciation.

However, victims and survivors no longer operate on automatic pilot because their complacency has been shattered (Taylor & Schneider, 1989). They take notice, take little for granted, and are motivated to live life differently. In the process of noticing, there is an attribution of specialness and an experience of appreciation. It is the awareness of vulnerability

and mortality that reveals what it is to be alive and the realization that life can no longer be taken for granted (Janoff-Bulman, 1991; Taylor, 1990).

Over time, our recollection of a traumatic event may no longer be viewed as wholly tragic or negative. Ambivalence develops and, although the trauma is recognized as painful, terrifying, unchosen and unwanted, survivors are both wounded and enriched by the experience (Kushner, 1981; Viorst, 1986).

Enriched? I think that is pushing it a bit too far. I hardly feel enriched, and yet I do feel appreciation for my life, how Jordan is doing, and our relationship. I do appreciate the smaller things in life. I notice, and I also know, how precious and tenuous life can be. I know bad things happen to good people. I appreciate everyday my friends and my family, and I recognize the resilience of our family.

Autoethnography allows me to reflect on the experience and to attempt to make sense of it, what my experience was like, what role resilience and relationships played in my healing process and how the world looks now from a retrospective and reflexive place.



Autoethnography enabled me to study my life experience of Jordan's accident emotionally as Other and I, as the researcher and the participant. Once that experience was written in text, it became a representation and reproduction (Denzin, 1991). Writing and re-writing about my experience took much longer than the actual living of it and was much more intense in many ways. It began as a recollection and representation of my experience and, after time, the story became the experience. I saw the experience differently, from different angles and through different lenses.

A discussion of the literature was followed by reflective retrospection of the story in the context of my present life and other trauma and experiences of grief. I alluded to Jordan's disclosure of sexual abuse but did not tell the story. I realized what a difficult story it is to tell and I began to wonder why.

My style of writing was similar to Carol Rambo-Ronai's in that it layered the story with relevant literature, analyzed the narrative in the form of sense-making from a retrospective perspective, analyzed and challenged the literature, and used alternating voices. At first it appeared as a more fragmented text, but later the use of italics, plain text, bold text and markers divided the text into sections providing continuity in the story for the reader. It then appeared as a more seamless layered text (see Bochner, 1997; Neumann, 1993). That was the style I found most comfortable at the time because it allowed me to give the desired message to the audience in the most meaningful way. I was still, however, "finding my voice."

My dissertation and my writing have evolved since that time. My writing has taken many twists and turns as autoethnography became a path of discovery and learning. And I am still learning. I am still trying to sort out what autoethnography is and perhaps what it is not. The discussion about autoethnography is ongoing and, as I continue to meet with my co-supervisors, (Debbie and Pat); we begin to sort out the complexities of this dissertation.

It is my turn for coffee and I rush to Starbucks to pickup the usual: one grande americano, one grande extra hot latte, and one decaf grande triple skinny hazelnut latte along with treats (three cookies to share pieces of each amongst us). I look forward to these meetings and the conversation, and I rush to be on time. Debbie and Pat are waiting for me as

usual, chatting about holidays and a chance to take a break from the “rat race” of academic life. I pass around the coffee and treats and join in the conversation. I am hoping for a bit of a holiday this summer as well, but know I should be writing if I want to complete this by next semester. The atmosphere is friendly and inviting, and we move the conversation easily to the task at hand.

Today our plan is to talk about methodology --about how I will address, both within the dissertation and within my defense, questions about autoethnography as methodology. In anticipation of this, I have crammed my briefcase full of all the articles, book chapters and books I have been reading on a/e, which we have been passing back and forth among ourselves. I empty the extensive contents onto the table now.

“I am wondering how you would describe the writing of a/e, Lee, after you have used this storied form for quite a length of time now?” Pat inquires.

I think about this and I respond, “I believe autoethnography, and ultimately stories, are often multilayered, multidimensional emotional accounts. Most often, my stories are told retrospectively using first person and present tense. The sights, sounds, feelings, emotions, and impressions are brought to the surface. In this way, I hope to bring the readers into the story so that they can relate the story to their own experience or experiences-- sometimes similar experiences, sometimes not.”

I pause for a moment to reflect and then continue, “I had many questions when I began this research and some of those questions still remain. I have grappled with the literature to help me make sense of this particular methodology and approach. Writing this

dissertation was a very emotional experience, inside and outside the writing. I often wondered about the value of this emotionality."

"Perhaps a/e is not possible without it," Debbie replies. "There are few methodologies that address and recognize the richness and depth of human emotion. As you know, Ellis speaks strongly about how emotions are not rational constructs that can be explained by simplistic models of human behavior, nor are they only socially determined. The study of emotions requires the intersection of the internal and social experience of emotion (Ellis, 1991). To use Ellis' words, she suggests "the use of systematic sociological introspection as a way to look at lived experience and to study our own emotions reflexively" (p. 37).

Pat nods and elaborates on this: "Emotional processes are very complex and I like how Ellis talks explicitly about how they are associated with and overlap with cognitive, behavioral, and physiological processes."

"I think that, in general, many researchers have not done a good job of acknowledging, recognizing, and examining all components of the human lived experience," I explain. "Emotionality has most often been relegated to the fringe of scientific work and it was not until 1975 that the sociology of emotions was recognized with an article on emotions published in a feminist collection, written by Arlie Russell Hochschild. For more than a generation, a cognitive perspective dominated social sciences and social science research (Kemper, 1990)," I explain.

"Yes, and despite the fact that the sociology of emotions was recognized in social science research, it continued to be viewed from a positivist perspective. Emotions were treated as objective and measurable constructs," Debbie insists.

"I like the way Carolyn Ellis (1991), explains this. She argues that the emotional experience can be made more accessible and closer to the lived experience in three ways. One way is to study emotions emotionally. The second is to view our own emotions as researchers in relationship to how we feel and what is going on in our research. The third way is to study how emotions feel in the context of people's everyday lives," I reply.

I continue, "For example, I wrote an angry and disturbing autoethnographic short story about my telling a police officer about Jordan's disclosure, as part of providing possible evidence in the case. I wrote it in the first person present tense as I recalled and positioned myself within the experience. Do you remember that later I re-wrote it, with your encouragement, from a different perspective, a different place in time as I attempted to make sense of the experience, and the anger, through analysis and relationship to relevant literature?"

Both Debbie and Pat nod and I continue, "I attempted to step back from the moment and reflect on my experience. This involved a focus on the description of behavior and feelings in intimate detail. My intent was to portray an image of the experience and the anger and the hopelessness of the situation. It also portrayed the social and political issues related to childhood sexual abuse and the resulting investigation. My personal struggle then

provided an understanding and interpretation not only at an individual level but also at an institutional level.”

“And this is so important, Lee. I know you don’t want to lead or direct the reader, but I think it is important to make the connection between your personal stories and the broader political and social issues your stories raise,” Debbie reminds me.

Debbie and I have had this conversation often. I am very respectful of what Debbie is saying, but I reply, “I want to be careful not to make a big leap from my stories to the broader issues. I want the readers to make their own connections as a result of hearing my stories, and yet I understand what you are saying. Carolyn Ellis (2009) states that she is ‘interested in how these micro-events apply to and teach us about macro-structures and processes. [She] cares deeply that [her] stories have the potential to impact and improve social conditions’ (p. 15). She indicates that ‘this can happen through examining lives one at a time and encouraging voice, person by person, as well as through the explicit focus on social justice or connection with an interest group, ideology, or party politics’ (Ellis, 2009, p. 15). I definitely agree with this, but I still struggle with how explicit I should make this for the reader.”

“You are right, Lee. A/e is more implicit and does not ‘proclaim how things are or how life should be lived, but instead’, as Ellis says, it ‘strives to open up a moral and ethical conversation with readers about the possibilities of living life well’ (Ellis, 2009, p. 17). But Ellis also presents a/e as a ‘social project that helps us understand a larger relational,

communal, and political world of which we are part and moves us to critical engagement, social action, and social change' (p. 229)," Debbie explains.

I reply, "I want to get in the way, just as Lather and Smithies (1997) did in *Troubling the Angels*, and challenge the reader to recognize the complexities and messiness of their own stories while still finding their own answers. My stories are intended to create discussion of difficult issues, difficult knowledge, vulnerabilities, the imbalance of power, and our individual and societal responsibilities (Ellis, 2004). Do you still believe I should look at Chapter VII more closely to see if I have made these important connections?" I ask.

"Yes, I do, Lee. You have already brought these issues to the surface in your stories, but I think it would be useful to make those connections in Chapter VII--to unpack them further, not to guide the reader so much as to connect the personal with the practical and social implications of this study," Debbie replies and continues, "This will provide the justification for your study, the reason why this work is so important."

"I agree, but I also have to keep in mind that the readers will determine what they see as important and they will determine that through their own experiential lenses. I can not assume that the reader will make the same meaning as me or that readers will make similar meanings to each other necessarily. I also have to accept that just because I have told my story does not mean I have had some influence on a reader," I insist.

"That is very true. However, your stories are very evocative and powerful, and I believe they will move the reader to relate in many ways," Debbie responds.

"I agree," Pat replies thoughtfully, "I am also wondering how your positionality contributes to or influences your stories and the way you tell your stories."

I think about this and reply, "My stories come from a position of subjectivity, emotionality, relationship and trauma. I also realize that this study is situated in who I am, where I come from, in my values and beliefs, and in the concepts I believe guide this research. I am a nurse and I come from a perspective of caring and healing and from a holistic approach to health and wellness. I am also a nurse-therapist, and I believe I come from a counseling perspective of acceptance and, at the very least, understanding. I am also an academic and a student, but most of all, I am a mother. Recognition of this positionality and multiplicity helps me to examine and make sense of my experiences as a mother and of my reluctance to share my stories and my secrets of mothering."

"I believe this exploration requires a critical perspective, as well as an element of interpretation (for the reader and writer), and some degree of social construction of the emotions and the experience. Would you agree, Lee?" Pat asks.

"Yes," I respond, "I believe Norman Denzin calls it (1997; 2000; 2008) 'interpretive interaction' in that it attempts to make meaning of lived experience. It 'endeavors to capture and represent the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied . . . and focuses on those life experiences that radically alter and shape meanings persons give to themselves and their experiences' (Denzin, 2000, p. 905). In this approach, writers must be openly present in their texts and make their values clear; I have really tried to do that as I wrote. An important part of interpretive interaction, according to Denzin, is examining the link between personal

problems and public policies or institutions. He says it speaks to the relationship between private troubles and the public response to these troubles and works outward from the biography of the person (2000). So this also fits with the point that you were making earlier, Debbie."

Debbie nods and adds, "Denzin (2000) also explains that interpretive interaction emphasizes the uniqueness of lives and uses an individual case to provide understanding and interpretation at an individual and societal level. Interpretation as he explains it, seeks to understand the fundamental meanings of social life and the essence of the everyday world. Interpretation also involves multiple meanings. Multiple meanings are constructed through the emotionality and subjectivity of the writer and the reader. This social construction is not meant to seek a single truth or single reality but to construct meaning from the stories told and heard."

"I agree, Debbie," Pat affirms, "Grounding your interpretations in lived experience connects the internal with the social and enables you to attend to multiple and often conflicting meanings, as Denzin (1992) explains."

"Denzin & Lincoln (2000) also write about how the interpretive interactional approach allows for an intra and inter-subjective perspective of the experience," Debbie adds.

I agree and reply, "My stories involve relationships with family, friends, community, and those people representing institutions. In this way, particular areas of potential personal, political, and social change may be recognized. Readers then recognize these particular areas in relationship to themselves despite the fact that the research flows from my beliefs and

values, from what I decide counts as real or important and from how I come to know or understand the world. The approach I use in my research embraces plurality, change, emotion, complexity, contradiction, vulnerability, ambiguity, imagination, and insight. It embraces a perspective of my individual reality and subjective experience as a way of knowing and understanding that social reality."

"And again remembering that readers will make their own meaning, understanding and knowing regarding the phenomenon," Pat reminds me.

"I think that is so important to recognize, Pat, as there has been considerable criticism of a/e of late, stating that there are perhaps too many assumptions made around the experience of "I" in a/e and that there are limitations to the reliance on experience and narrative voice. Jackson & Mazzei (2008) claim that a/e has exchanged transcendency for transparency," I reply.

"I have heard that argument," Debbie replies, "I believe they are proposing a performative "I" rather than a narrative "I." Is that correct?"

"Yes, they are arguing that a narrative "I" claims a truth and a performative "I" confronts truths that are both possible and impossible; a way of telling that disturbs thought and attempts to explore how the researcher's experiences both constrain and limit what is knowable. In some ways, it reminds me of the more traditional qualitative research that asks the researcher to explain the limitations of the study," I explain.

Debbie nods and Pat replies, "I agree but hmmm, what I see is that you have done both, Lee. You have presented a narrative "I" in your stories, but you have also troubled those stories,

troubled the discourse behind those stories and you have discussed, agreed, argued and disagreed with the literature related to those stories and repeatedly indicated that you want readers to make their own sense and take their own meaning from the stories. You have been very thorough and clear about your stories not being a truth. I would have to disagree with Kathy Charmaz (2006) who claims that 'although autoethnographers disavow truth claims [she sees] their views as amounting to truth claims' (p. 399). You never make the connection between your experience and a truth."

"I think that a/e is really catching on; it is on a roll so to speak and is picking up speed. Perhaps other researchers want to get on the bandwagon, but they still want to maintain their own corner/place on that wagon. They are attempting to do that by using language to describe a/e from their perspective," I respond.

"Isn't that similar to what Arthur Bochner refers to when he disputes Leon Anderson's term "analytical autoethnography"?" Debbie asks.

"Yes, he and Carolyn Ellis challenge the use of that term and indicate that 'analytic a/e looks like realist ethnography; it has the feel or lack of feel(ing) of realist ethnography' " (Ellis and Bochner, 2009, p. 432).

"That's pretty strong language," Pat says.

"Yes, it is Pat, but I think Ellis and Bochner's (2006) fear is that 'realists may appropriate a/e . . . turn it into mainstream ethnography, . . . water it down, . . . bring it under the control of reason, logic, analysis . . . and generalization' (p. 433). But you're right; it is pretty strong language," Debbie indicates.

Pat goes on to say, "Ellis and Bochner also remind us that 'theory,' 'analysis' and 'generalization' are invented categories and theory is not necessarily superior to stories. They say that if we focus on how we know, it will lead to analysis and generalization, but if we focus on how we should live, it brings us 'into lived experiences in a feeling and embodied way. This is the moral of autoethnographic stories--its ethical domain' " (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 439). And Norman Denzin (2006) indicates that [a/e] practices "are performative, pedagogical, and political (p. 422). He goes on to say that we enact our worlds and in doing so we challenge, contest, disrupt and deconstruct the hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other and ourselves.

"That makes sense to me, but it really challenges traditional methods of research. However, I think we have to remember that Ellis and Bochner are two of the originators of a/e writing. Their emphasis is on evocation as a goal for a/e and also on writing narratively. Their enthusiasm for a/e was 'instigated by a desire to move ethnography away from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer and toward the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation' (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433). Of course they have concerns," I comment and continue, "It also takes us back to our earlier discussion because Bochner insists that the use of stories in a/e does the work of analysis and theorizing. He says that successful a/e texts are analytical without providing explicit explanation or interpretation for the reader. Readers make their own meaning, as I said before. Giving the reader that interpretation and explanation reminds me of the discussion piece of traditional research."

"But does making the connection between your personal stories and the broader issues resemble analysis and theorizing, or does it reflect the context and complexity of your stories? After all, can we be 'good mothers' in a 'bad society' to put it simplistically?" Debbie tries to explain.

I think some days Debbie must think I am quite thick. But I am starting to grasp her meaning. It does make sense to re-visit Chapter VII, but I want to be careful not to make it look like a discussion chapter. Perhaps the use of myth (see Poulus, 2009; Goodall, 2000; Abram, 1996; May, 1991) may be a creative way to reflect on my secrets of mothering without directing the reader by providing explicit analysis and theorizing. Perhaps it is a vehicle to bring attention to the contextual aspects and the complexity of the secrets of mothering.

I pause for a moment and stretch back in my chair. I need more coffee to wash down the calorie-free Starbucks cookies. I look at Pat and Debbie and I think back on my journey thus far and the course work and exploration I have done. I want my work to have meaning and to make a difference, and Pat and Debbie have continuously supported and encouraged this.

I take one more stretch and say, "I think John Dewey (1930) was ahead of his time when he promoted the moral importance of the social sciences. I think we need to keep this in mind regardless of what methodology we use. Denzin and Giardina (2009) identify 'research participation in a moral community.' They indicate the purpose of research is to 'uncover . . . construct . . . and pursue peace and social justice.' They also insist that 'dialogue

is the key to conducting qualitative research . . . and knowledge is assessed in terms of its relevance for concrete experiences within everyday life' " (Denzin & Giardina, 2009, p. 29).

Debbie adds, "I think this supports your work, Lee, and perhaps this will answer some of the questions you have had about your final oral defence."

I always have questions about my final dissertation defence as if I believe Debbie and Pat have some kind of crystal ball to predict how it will go and what the questions will be about. I question my work often and I worry that my work will not meet the criteria for PhD research. But Debbie and Pat are very patient and try their best to answer my questions and reassure me.

"What if they ask about generalizability, transferability, validity etc.? Should I just say I do not speak this language any more?" I ask.

Pat smiles. He knows this language much better than I do. "The story's generalizability can be judged by whether it speaks to readers about their experience (Ellis, 1997). 'A story's generalizability is always being tested—not in the traditional way through random samples of respondents, but by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know' (Ellis, 2004, p. 195). Readers look at a story and make comparisons. Does the story speak to them about their lives, about someone they know, or about something they didn't know before? Can they make meaning from the story? Does the story have 'naturalistic generalizability' (Stake, 1994)? In other words, does it connect one world with another? Does the story provide the reader with a

vicarious experience about the things told? These are the questions we need to be asking," he explains.

"What would you say about validity, Debbie?" Pat asks.

"Well, as you are aware, I don't use that word," she replies.

We all laugh and Debbie continues, "I prefer to use words such as authenticity, adequacy, plausibility (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 185). And as you know 'resonance' (Hoffman, 1994) is an important criterion for me. Validity can not be used in a quantitative sense in a/e because we are not attempting to measure something exactly. Similarly, we are not generalizing to a broader population or speaking to consistency or dependability. If I were forced to think about validity in this work, I would say that a story's validity can be judged by whether it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is authentic and lifelike, believable and plausible."

"That reminds me of the work of Carol Rambo Ronai (1992, 1995.) She spoke to me very clearly. I first read a story/narrative she wrote about being the child of a mentally retarded mother. Later, I read her story about being an erotic dancer to put herself through grad school, and still later, her story of the experience of childhood sexual abuse. Her courage to tell her stories spoke directly to me. Her experience was distinct from mine, yet it brought forth my own stories. It brought forth and challenged my own courage. The story had meaning for Ronai and for me. I felt a connection with her, and the story was not only valid but also very real at a much deeper level," I say. "And I also agree and understand that the terms 'reliability' and 'generalizability,' don't apply here. Instead, we use the terms

'authenticity', 'resonance', etc. to capture the particularity and complexity of human experience."

"What about representation?" I ask.

"I agree with Bochner (1997; 2002). We should be more concerned with communication than representation," Debbie responds and adds, "I think form is a choice to ensure communication--a means to an end, if you will--not an end in itself. It is a choice that enhances, strengthens and deepens the message."

"Again we need to be answering important questions in this area. For example, does the story open up dialogue? Does it challenge us to address issues about social justice, inequity, and abuse? Does it challenge our values, beliefs, and assumptions?" Pat suggests.

"That is true Pat. I think about how Lee's stories have opened up dialogue for us--not only the process of the writing but also the connections we make to our own lives and societal norms. We are moved to want to do something. We begin to challenge the normative discourse of mothering and academia, and also the normative discourse in general. We recognize social justice and abuse issues. The stories stir up something inside of us; they open up discussion and conversation," Debbie insists.

"I believe the stories do challenge the normative discourse of mothering and academia. And perhaps a/e as methodology also challenges the normative discourse of how we do research," I ponder.

"I think that is why a/e is so important to this work. Autoethnography offers an important dimension to this work that other methodologies do not," Debbie indicates and

continues, "Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that purposefully connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). You use your own experiences within the culture of mothering to reflexively look more deeply at your multiple selves and your interactions with others (Holt, 2003). You're a/e stories, Lee, focus on you in a social context. They connect social science to literature, academic interests to personal ones, emotions to cognition, and social life to the concrete living of it (Ellis, 1991; 1993; 1995; 1997). Your authentic first-hand knowledge of the culture is sufficient to lend authority to the text (Deck, 1990). First person autoethnographic accounts open an important avenue to exploring the intricacies of intimate communication that are left out or ignored in much social science research (Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; 2002)," Debbie elaborates.

"I like how Tierney phrases it. Your exploration of the secrets of mothering allow for the silenced voices of mothers and others, and your own silenced voice, to speak out and challenge the oppression that often causes the silence (Tierney, 1993)," Pat replies.

"I wonder if people relate to a personal story at a different level. Does a story have more impact than statistics?" I ask.

"Your stories impact me differently than statistics, Lee. I learn about myself and explore my own mothering when I read your stories. Your stories provide companionship and coping strategies for dealing with the personal issues of mothering and our multiplicity as mothers, the disappointment, trauma, loss, and emotions such as shame, blame, guilt, grief that are such an integral part of mothering. They help me to understand and reframe my own lived experience," Debbie explains.

"And as Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) discuss, a/e encourages us to make decisions about how we live, to compare our lives with others, to recognize and form our identities, connect with others, open our eyes and hearts to the world around us and ultimately change our lives and the world for the better" Pat adds.

"I read Carolyn Ellis (2009) recently and she states that 'expressing feelings vulnerably on the page invites others to express how they feel, comparing their experiences to mine and to each other's. Good a/e works toward a *communitas*, where we might speak together of our experiences, find commonality of spirit, companionship in our sorrow, balm for our wounds, and solace in reaching out to those in need as well' (pp. 209-210)," I say.

I think about this healing aspect and continue, "As Coles (1989) said, 'A good story is one that others can take in and use for themselves' (p. 22). I story myself and my experiences of mothering because I believe I have an important story to tell, and I want to tell it well. This is facilitated by allowing myself to be vulnerable, attempting to look at my experience from multiple perspectives and attempting to make sense of and create understanding of the experiences while still keeping myself 'open for evolving meanings of what [I] tell and write' (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 16). My stories allow me to rediscover the past in scenes, emotions, and images written by me within the conditions set by me. As I write the stories, I re-experience what happened in the story (Denzin, 2008). I recreate the story and my presence in the story, and I come into being with the telling (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). The story becomes part of my life" (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

"Your unraveling of your secrets of mothering and the disruption of the discourse surrounding that would not have been possible in the same way with a more traditional methodology. A/e has opened the door to looking at a means of doing research in more creative and subjective ways," Debbie explains.

"I fully embrace a/e, obviously, but there is part of me that still wonders if this work will be considered scholarly by others who will be judging my work," I say hesitantly and continue, "I want my writing to be intense and evocative, but I also struggle with the expectation of scholarship in my writing. I realize my story is an interpretation of my experience at a point in time and place and does not necessarily capture all of the lived experience."

Pat is quick to jump in and say, "When I think of scholarly work, I think of relevance, significance, and the contributions the work will make to theory, practice and research. The contributions of this work are, and will be, significant. This includes the contributions to the discourse and practice of mothering, the phenomenon of secrets of mothering, and the visibility of sexual abuse. Also your experiential expertise on a/e will add to the number of faculty on this campus who are familiar with a/e and available to supervise students who are interested in exploring, and possibly integrating, this methodology into their own research--not to mention the contributions your project has made to the education of adolescents with developmental disabilities."

"I agree, and also as Ellis (2009) states, 'Scholarship should be caring, meaningful, and concerned with justice. Autoethnography is about creativity and risk-taking' (p. 9). Your work has met this criteria as well, Lee," Debbie reminds me.

"I am wondering if my methods will be difficult for others to understand if I am asked questions about data," I ponder and then continue, "My 'data' is my life experience. It has been created by positioning myself in a past experience and writing from that space as if I were there at the moment. And my experiences since that time are mixed in and add to the complexity of the story. My stories are written in the present tense as I relive the story, going back in time and re-experiencing it as I remember it now. The stories are situated in a specific time in my life but are constructed from my current perspective of those memories. The memories may not be complete; there may be gaps, and other interpretations (limited or partial), but I tell my stories 'at a particular time, for a particular purpose, to a particular audience' " (Ellis, 2009, p. 13).

"And you also recognize that the meanings and significance of the past are incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to contingencies of your present life circumstances and your projection of your life into the future" (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997)," Debbie continues.

"So, as Richardson (1990, 1992) would say, your stories are both a means of knowing and a way of telling about the social world. Or, as Clandinin and Connelly (1994; 2000) would say, they are both phenomenon and method. Right, Debbie? And those who read your stories will relate in different ways depending on their own experiences. While I am not

a mother, I am a parent. I have thought a lot about parenting since I began reading your dissertation--and also about the busyness of this faculty position," Pat comments.

I smile and relate to what he is saying, "I guess we all have stories and they are part of our psychological and ideological make-up (Coles, 1989). And our personal relationships become a big part of those stories, and personal relationships are lived within the tensions constituted by memories of the past, and anticipation of the future" (Vandervoort & Duck, 2000).

Pat replies, "The process is imaginative and creative, and it links the disruptive events in your stories--I think that's how Reissman (1992) refers to them--to finding identity and healing and to recognizing the discontinuities, 'what should have been with what was' (p. 232). It becomes what Wiersman (1992) calls 'an improved story' (p. 195). It allows us, as Reissman describes, to make connections and thus meaning by linking past and present, self and society."

"That is very true. The stories I tell today are different from the stories I told in the past or the stories I will tell in the future. Jordan's accident looks different today than it did in the moment. I only know now that the dual roles I was playing (nurse/mom) got in the way of my insisting on a CT scan. But I also realize now that it was not my responsibility to ensure necessary CT scans be done. As time goes by, the story will change with new understanding and meaning. And those who read the story will relate in different ways depending on their own experiences," I try to explain and continue "because we do retell our

stories over and over and the story is never the same twice. It is said that with each telling there is further healing, and I hope that is true."

"I believe in the idea put forward that making meaning of our experiences is part of the healing process. Who was it that wrote, 'All sorrows can be borne if you can put them into a story or tell a story about them'? The story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of happenings (Dinesen as cited in Arendt, 1968). At the very least, as Cole (1992) asserts, there is something about telling a tale again and again that in and of itself gives shape and meaning to the experience," Debbie adds.

I think about my own stories and who will now hear those stories and I say, "In the past, I have told my stories/secrets only to those people I identified as close and connected to me. But now the audience is no longer in my control. It will not only be those I identify as close and supportive but also many others, people I know well, people I don't know very well and people I don't know at all. That is a bit scary; however, I want my stories and my struggle with the telling and keeping of secrets, particularly secrets related to mothering, to resonate with people. I want my audience to be other moms/parents who have experienced loss, grief, painful life events and the need to keep secrets. I want my audience to be other professionals, particularly those from health and education. I want them to relate to the story at a personal, professional and societal level. I believe if we can relate to a feeling, we have a much better chance of understanding it. But I am concerned about the therapeutic piece because I have heard the criticism about a/e being about self-absorption and privilege. And that disturbs me to some degree," I reason.

Debbie responds quickly and adamantly, "A person writing autoethnography needs to be self-absorbed and also needs to be absorbed with the world she inhabits and the processes she finds herself a part of, which also work their way into one's identity. Our understanding of others can only proceed from within our own experience, and this experience involves our personalities and histories as much as our field research" (Ellis, 1997).

"I am hoping that telling my story is not only therapeutic for me but also evocative for others. I hope it will help others to understand and cope. And perhaps that interaction between me and the reader will encourage the reader to participate more fully in the emotional process, not merely observe the resolution (Ellis, 1997). I remember when Jordan was born I longed to talk to other parents with Down syndrome children. I searched for information and it was all so gloomy and outdated. I was excited whenever I saw another Down syndrome child and felt an immediate bond with the parents. I always wanted to introduce myself, talk to them, and compare notes. I found a book once about a cute little girl with Down syndrome and her story of success. I always kept it close and read it often," I reflect.

"The telling and retelling are reflexively related to living and reliving a story. They provide opportunities for growth, change, and resistance to our culture's canonical narratives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), Debbie replies.

Pat says, "Autoethnography is an opportunity for you to tell your story in an academic environment, and I guess you could say that is a position of privilege. However, dissemination of the research is an opportunity to share the experience with those who are not familiar and with those who are. People who are not mothers or even parents will understand

perhaps the issues surrounding the secrets of mothering, and those who are mothers will have a sense of companionship and of not being alone with their experiences, and they may be encouraged to tell their own story. You also tell your stories from a position of vulnerability as well as one of privilege."

"But that vulnerability may make people uncomfortable, or it may be threatening in some way," I reply.

Debbie replies, "That is part of the purpose of a/e. It is meant to be evocative and disturbing in some ways, as well as healing. When people identify with your stories, it may make them uncomfortable but it is such discomfort that causes change and growth. As Ellis and Bochner (1996) say, you are writing to people rather than about people."

Pat replies as well, "You are right, Lee. Researchers who write about their own emotions risk being vulnerable and being judged by others, particularly colleagues, as odd, self-absorbed or emotional exhibitionists."

"I feel uncomfortable, emotional, and vulnerable when I tell my stories, but that is not a good enough reason not to tell. I believe the readers will feel uncomfortable also, but that is not a good enough reason not to tell or not to read the story," I reply.

I think about my stories once again and the challenges and vulnerability involved in writing a/e. I laid my stories alongside the literature in the field, the discourse, novels, poems and myths, to see what threads emerged--to have a means to think about and reflect on my experience. I say, "In Ellis' 2004 book, *The Ethnographic I*, she indicates that stories can be analytical in and of themselves, and the focus is on the story itself. She also refers to Arthur

Frank's (1995) distinction between narrative analysis (with a story) and analysis of narrative (about a story). Analysis about narrative is referred to as 'thinking with' a story. We experience the story as affecting our life and making meaning of our life and that is my focus."

"You also refer to analysis and interpretation processes (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007) in your work around narrative inquiry, don't you, Debbie?" Pat asks.

"Yes," Debbie replies and goes on to explain, " [I] used a process of analysis that drew deeply on the narrative inquiry commonplaces as a framework for [my] interpretation of [my] field texts' " (p. 28).

"I'm not sure what you mean by commonplaces. Could you explain?" asks Pat.

"Yes, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) outline three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: Temporality (remembering that all people and events have a past, present, and future and are always in a state of transition); Sociality (keeping in mind personal conditions and existential conditions); and Place (the specific physical place and the sequences of place where the inquiry takes place). I used the commonplaces as a framework for analysis and made this visible to the reader," Debbie explains.

"Do you think these same criteria can be applied to my work, and if so, have I met the criteria?" I ask Debbie.

"I think so, Lee. You address temporality as you move back and forth in time with your stories and you often look to the future. You address sociality when you expose your raw emotions, feelings, hopes, and dreams and give the reader a good understanding of your

multiplicity. You also address it when you share your interactions with others and their responses to your mothering, to your secrets, to the tellings of your secrets of mothering," Debbie replies.

I think about this for a moment and reply, "I guess I do go back and forth between now and then, including the present tense story and also reflection, interpretation and some analysis. It is a way of making meaning and deepening understanding. As a result there are multiple meanings for the story," I respond.

Pat says, "I like the way Carolyn Ellis puts it. She says she is 'a writer not a reporter . . . [She focuses] on the construction of stories and their meanings rather than on the collection, organization, verification and presentation of evidence, desiring that [her] work assist people in their everyday lives' (Ellis, 2009, p. 14). That makes sense to me and I appreciate her candidness."

"I guess I have one last concern. Do you think that I will be challenged about a bias in the literature I include?" I ask and continue, "Is it a bias or subjectivity?"

"Of course, there is a bias, Lee. There is a bias in all research. We all choose a research topic that is of deep personal interest to us, and literature that helps us think hard about that topic. We decide where we will stand in any field and why. The important thing is that we say why we made the decisions we did, that we make our thinking visible. I don't think that's an issue. What do you think, Pat?" Debbie asks.

"No, I don't think so," Pat says and continues, "I don't think it would be possible to do an exhaustive search of all the possible areas/concepts in your study, for example, secrets,

mothering, motherhood, the mask of mothering, childhood sexual abuse, adoption and illegitimacy, trauma, dissociation, divorce and separation, normative discourse, not to mention the extensive literature on autoethnography. You had to choose what fits, what was relevant, what the focus of your inquiry would be. Also, I remember you discussing the very limited research on the phenomenon of the secrets of mothering itself."

"There is extensive writing concerned with mothering and motherhood, particularly through the Association of Research on Mothering, as well as the books of Susan Maushart and Adrienne Rich. The authors all recognize the discrepancy between the discourse and practice of mothering and they discuss hiding our thoughts, feelings and emotions regarding mothering for fear of being labeled as a 'bad mom.' However, I did not find anyone in the literature who discussed the phenomenon of secrets of mothering in the same context as me. Most of the literature I found regarding secrets of mothering was related to secrets that would help us be 'better moms.' For example, *A Mother's Book of Secrets: Keys to Making Motherhood Memorable, Meaningful and Magnificent* (Eyre & Pothier, 2009) discusses insight, tips, motivation and inspiration to be a 'better mom,' hardly the context of what I want to address," I say rather sarcastically.

"I also remember you talking about other literature in this area that discussed secrets of 'sloppy mothering' (letting your kids eat milk bones and showering four times a day to get away from your kids because showering is a legitimate excuse) and also 'magic mothering secrets' (providing the best environment for fostering your child's best self), which both come up against or perpetuate the discourse you are attempting to disrupt. And I do

remember you talking about Michele Barba's book (2006), *12 Simple Secrets Real Moms Know: Getting Back to Basics and Raising Happy Kids*. I know the term 'real moms' perplexed you, but you did mention something about the context of the book," Pat indicates.

"Yes that's true. Although she discusses 12 principles that child experts and 5000 parents say matter most in good mothering--using another two terms that disturb me: 'experts' and 'good mothering,' she did address sacrificial mothering and how that is bad for kids," I explain.

Debbie adds, "I also remember you searching the body of knowledge surrounding the discourse of secrets only to discover that it did not fit your context, that secrets of mothering were in fact a different kind of secret."

"However, Sissela Bok's (1989) discussion of secrets did fit secrets of mothering in a lot of ways, and I found it very useful," I reply.

"There is such a connection between all these concepts as you tell and unravel your own secrets of mothering and trouble the discourse surrounding that, Lee," Debbie adds.

"It is funny that you say that because I was doing spell check last evening on Jordan's disclosure piece and everything merged in my head. I was sitting there, objectively for those moments, looking at my story of the disclosure for spelling and grammatical errors. I went back to that place in time when I wrote the story and re-experienced all the pain and agony. I envisioned that day in my mind and went back to see, feel and experience the thoughts and emotions of that life-altering day, a very subjective experience, yet I read it last evening with spelling and grammar in mind, one word at a time rather than a story. It is

still difficult to read as a story. It seems surreal in some ways, again, the multiplicity of being a mom and a writer/researcher and the complexity and emotionality of reliving and recreating a story in time, the need and ability to separate from the emotions and do the work at hand. I have called upon this separation, this dissociation, many times during the writing of this dissertation, and I will need to call upon it again when I am required to defend my personal story and the methodology of storytelling. How do I step outside my stories to do that . . . or do I? Can I be my multiple selves, or do I need to separate and be the student and the researcher?" I ponder.

"I'm not sure, Lee," Debbie replies.

As I reflect, I realize how naïve I was when I began this journey. I was naïve about a/e writing. I was naïve about what my stories would bring forth. I was naïve about the emotional impact on my family and me. I was naïve about the ethical challenges. I was naïve about how this journey would unfold, and I was naïve about the risks and the task at hand. I was not so naïve, however, that I thought I could do this alone. I could not have done this work without the support of the academic community, namely my co-supervisors. Someone indicated to me that, if my proposal did not receive ethical approval, I could simply choose another topic and approach for my dissertation and do this work later, after I had received my PhD. That would not have happened. This type of work can not be done for the first time, alone. It requires constant support, encouragement and sorting out. It is an ominous task that is not for the faint of heart.

But I did find the support that Dr. Robinson knew was necessary, both in supervisors and in a department. I think back to that time and reflect on the beginning and the unknown

challenges that lay ahead. Dr Robinson gave me a heads-up and encouraged me to pursue this methodology while still keeping in mind all the possible challenges. I remember our discussion once again:

"But if I could find support for this methodology, if I could convince them of its merit and my desire to do this, then it would be possible?" I persist.

"Yes perhaps, but you may have a very difficult time receiving ethical approval," he insists.

I think about this again now but this time with a real understanding of the wisdom of those words.

II

REFLECTIONS ON THE ETHICS APPROVAL PROCESS

Recognizing how messy writing about intimate others can be, I have wanted to treat all [my] stories with love and care, while at the same time present [my] life as complex and many-sided...My goal has been to balance my ethical responsibilities to participants with my truth-telling obligations to readers while accepting the risks and taking on the burdens that come with writing intimately about myself and my relationships with others.

Carolyn Ellis (2009, p. 10)

I can sense something is wrong but no one is acknowledging it. Pat has left a message on my voice mail indicating "the ethics committee needs more time for considerations." It doesn't sound good. I am wondering what that means exactly. I send an email to Debbie asking her what she knows and she replies:

Date: October

To: Lee Murray

From: Debbie Pushor

Subject: Ethics

Pat just returned from Kansas (although he wasn't wearing red shoes) and dropped in to see me about the ethics board review of your ethics application. A representative from the ethics committee would like to meet with the three of us to talk more about your work. Are you available Monday morning (October 30th) or any time on Wednesday, November 1st? If you reply all, Pat and I can then go ahead and schedule with a representative from the ethics committee. Thanks, Lee. Touch bases if you have any questions. It seems the ethics committee is just being very thorough and wants to get a more comprehensive picture of what your work may involve.

I am presenting at a conference and am not planning to return home until the afternoon of November 1st. I will need to make other arrangements. The weather is bad, and it will be an eight hour drive home. The soonest I can leave is following my presentation on

October 31st. I have this ominous feeling that something is wrong. I knew ethical approval was not going to be easy, but I have a sense that there may be some real resistance to my proposal. I email Debbie to let her know that I plan to be back for a meeting on the 1st, hopefully in the afternoon. Debbie emails back later in the day:

Date: October

From: Debbie Pushor

To: Lee Murray

Subject: Ethics

Hi Lee,

A representative from the ethics committee has been communicating with Pat and so I don't have any details yet about their response or their questions. Pat and I are planning to meet tomorrow and I will email you immediately afterwards. I'm not sure where we're at with this at all right now but, once I know, we will figure out a response and a strategy. You have studied the ethics policy well and are well versed in both the ethics guidelines and in your methodology. I have real confidence that we can speak to any questions they have. On another note, I had lunch yesterday at Moxie's. Jordan was working so I introduced myself as a friend of yours. He was so warm and responsive. It was great to meet him in person. Have a great conference, Lee. I'll be in touch real soon.

Reading between the lines now, there is definitely a concern. Is the concern about autoethnography as methodology, confidentiality, anonymity, consent or what? I need to stop thinking about this and concentrate on the task at hand. My presentation is going to be incredibly lame if I don't relax and focus. But I wonder what is happening back at the university. What does it mean, "more time for consideration," "being very thorough," and "a more comprehensive picture??" It is starting to look like one big red flag. Another email arrives from Debbie on October 31st:

Date: October

From: Debbie Pushor

To: Lee Murray

Subject: Ethics

Hi Lee,

Sorry to not be in touch sooner. I have no new information. We are meeting with a representative from the ethics committee and Pat tomorrow at 10 a.m. We're going to meet in the EDADM general office and then find a meeting space. Come on by my office earlier, if you like, and we'll go together.

Pat does not know what time the Ethics Board Meeting is on Thursday. He feels we will make a judgment call tomorrow about whether we will attend on Thursday.

I am just sitting down now to read the documents (Armstrong, 2006; Christians, 2000; Ellis, 2006) you sent me so that I will be well situated in your work. I have every confidence that you can answer any questions the committee has for you, Lee. See you tomorrow.

I have just returned home from the conference and I read the emails several times because I am not sure what this means. There was a freak blizzard in Calgary and Banff and we had a very difficult time getting home. I still had my summer tires on and they weren't just summer tires; they were those sporty low profile tires that are hopeless in snow, sleet and ice.

We have made it home safely despite the ice and snow, but it is very late and my red, strained eyes peer at the computer screen and try to make sense of this email. It is spooky Halloween, but there are no gremlins around this late at night. The house is quiet and I can almost imagine that all is well. I am home safely; everyone is tucked in and sleeping, and there are several tootsie rolls left in the Halloween pumpkin. But even the sweetness of the tootsie rolls doesn't take away the bitter taste of the hidden message inside the email.

Tomorrow is November 1; in fact, in a few more minutes, it will be November 1. I am so tired. I

just want to sleep but I'm afraid I won't be able to sleep. I try to think positively. I'm sure things will work out. The ethics board just wants clarification. But why does a representative from the ethics committee want to meet with us? What is this other meeting on Thursday about? What if they won't give approval? What will I do? I have been so careful and thoughtful writing the application to the Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) for approval of my research protocol. I am aware of the risks for my children, others and myself; I have considered free and informed consent, anonymity and the emotional support that may be needed for my children and me. I have been open with my intentions, and I have tried to be transparent. Perhaps the committee does not understand autoethnography as methodology and the special ethical considerations that may need to be made.

Autoethnography requires a new way of looking at research and our intentions for research. It asks us to examine knowledge from a subjective position and it asks us to accept human experience as knowing. Autoethnography is often about difficult knowledge that may be difficult to hear. It also requires thoughtful telling in order to be heard. Sensitive stories require sensitivity--sensitivity for the writer and the reader. Perhaps I have not been thoughtful in the proposal. Perhaps I have been too candid and too harsh in my honesty. I realize autoethnography may make us uncomfortable but comfort seldom promotes change or movement.

Anonymity and free and informed consent take on a whole different meaning with autoethnography. Autoethnography is my story; it is the methodology of my dissertation. It not only includes me but also my family, friends and others. Can I hide who we are? How do I protect my family, others and myself? Does my family feel they need to be protected? The dissertation is an inquiry into secrets of mothering and an exploration and analysis of my life

situations, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings. It is an inquiry into secrets and difficult knowledge and how reluctant we are to talk about difficult topics such as developmental disabilities, sexual abuse, divorce, accidents, and illness. I remind myself that ethics approval will be difficult but not impossible.

I am sitting in this familiar room (Room #3058 EDADM), but I am feeling very uncomfortable. I usually enjoy meetings in this room but not today. There is definitely anxiety floating around the room. Pat looks intense, and I am not used to this side of him. Debbie is intent and thoughtful of the conversation, but I can almost see the hair standing up on the back of her neck. Both Pat and Debbie remain calm, respectful but persistent. At first I can not believe what I am hearing. A representative from the ethics committee is indicating that there are three main concerns, any one of which could stop the research. Stop the research! What does this mean "stop the research"? Stop is such a strong word. Isn't there any room for understanding and discussion? Will the ethics committee explain each of these concerns and allow room for discussion in context of the methodology?

The first concern is free and informed consent for my children (ages 29, 26 & 21). [By the time I complete this dissertation, they will all be middle-aged and therefore no longer a problem]. The concern is that my children will be unable to give free and informed consent due to the family structure. The committee does not think it is possible for children to be free to refuse consent when the parent is the researcher. They are particularly concerned about Jordan. The board is curious about Jordan's legal status, his ability to give consent and his ability to resist coercion.

I try to explain that my children are quite capable of deciding what they want and/or need to do. I struggle with this. If this were not true my children would never have challenged me, said "No" or made some of the adult decisions they have made. I encouraged Eve to go into Nursing; she went into Psychology. I knew McLeay was talented, and I was happy when he decided to go into film. I suggested he go to Ryerson because I thought a degree was important; he went to Cappilano College because he thought it was a better program, degree or not. I thought Jordan might enjoy working in a video store, but he insisted upon working in a restaurant. I suggested he begin dating the girl he took to grad, but he indicated she was too young. All adult decisions. All made regardless of what I thought or said.

I try to explain that autoethnography is "my" story and I have chosen to be open and transparent about my intents for this research. I explain that Jordan disclosed nine years ago and that getting to this place has been a family process. It has been a process of recovery and support. The telling of the story has been a family decision. I'm not sure why the assumption is made that my children are not aware of this decision, and I am quite confused that the assumption would be that I would even think of doing this without discussion and support from my children, in particular Jordan. Ethically, I am responsible to protect my children; morally, I am responsible to protect other children. Morally, I feel this story is a story that needs to be told.

The past and current research has informed us of the statistics related to sexual abuse and people with developmental disabilities, but the abuse continues and nothing seems to change. "One thousand cases is a statistic: one case is a tragedy" keeps ringing in my head. From my

perspective, the statistics do not appear to move people; hopefully, one story will evoke a response from people and promote action.

The representative from the ethics committee reassures me that the committee concurs that my intentions are proper. I think about this: "Intentions are proper." I have never really thought or considered this before that a researcher or a student may have improper intentions for a study, but I suppose it might happen.

That all researchers have good intentions is an assumption on my part. I agree with Carolyn Ellis (2007) in that "most people want to do the right thing. As human beings, we long to live meaningful lives that seek the good. As friends, we long to have trusting relationships that care for others. As researchers, we long to do ethical research that makes a difference. To come close to these goals, we constantly have to consider which questions to ask, which secrets to keep, and which truths are worth telling" (p. 26).

The representative from the ethics committee remains concerned about the structural situation of the family. It is not reasonable, from the committee's perspective, to think that my children are free to give consent or not. I try to explain that my children and I are at a place of recovery and that we, as a family, did not come to this decision lightly. It is a difficult story to tell; it is difficult to remember; it is difficult to see it in writing (print); it is difficult to know others will read it (people we know and people we don't know; people we care about and people we find difficult to care about), and it is very difficult to expose ourselves in this way. But we also feel an obligation as a family to tell the story that needs to be told.

I continue to question these assumptions surrounding free and informed consent for my adult children, and I keep asking myself why the assumption is not made that as a mother I would not want any harm to come to my children. Why can't that assumption be made? I finally ask this question of the representative, but I don't remember the answer or if there was a particular answer. However, the discussion begins to revolve around "assuming power in relationship."

Pat indicates, "Many research projects may not go forward if we assume this power. Debbie agrees and makes the point that, "If we don't challenge this assumption of power in relationship, important research may be blocked. Parents will not be able to do research with their own families; teachers will not be allowed to do research in their schools, and nurses will not be permitted to do research in their clinical settings."

"Action research for example is done in the researcher's own arena. The assumption of power in relationship can not only be in the context of the home" Debbie adds.

The second concern, of the board, is about support for my children and me. The committee is concerned that emotional and psychological support will be needed for me as a researcher and also for me and my children at a more personal level because they believe the writing will involve the reliving of a painful and difficult experience. I have identified my sister-in-law, a social worker, as a support person in my proposal. However, the committee is concerned that if it is a family member, it will only exacerbate the first concern, the structural pressure of relationship. They also recognize that identifying a neutral third party as the support person will compromise the confidentiality of my children. At this point

my head is spinning. I have so much I want to say, so much I need to say but the representative from the ethics committee goes on with the last and most problematic concern: "confidentiality."

I knew this would be a concern. I had attempted to explain in my proposal that maintaining my confidentiality and my children's was not reasonable in this situation. I had outlined a number of ways to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of others. The representative indicates that all these concerns are very problematic and indicates again that any one of these concerns alone could stop the research.

Pat looks concerned and troubled. He's very direct but seems to choose his language carefully. He asks, "How do we facilitate this research not just block it?" He also inquires whether this is an institutional stance and if this is the road we will continue to go down as a university.

This is definitely something to think about. Can we continue to judge qualitative research against the same standards we set for quantitative research? In addition, can we judge autoethnography and other forms of narrative, for example, memoir, performance ethnography and arts based research, against more traditional qualitative research, for example, surveys, focus groups, mixed methods and interviews. And is the role of an ethics board to judge or facilitate? If this is important research, how can we work together to make it happen in a very thoughtful and considerate manner? I'm sure the document the committee utilizes as a guide for decision-making speaks to facilitation whenever possible.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) (2005) that guides university ethics committees across Canada encourages sensitive and thoughtful implementation of the spirit and requirements of the document. The goals of the TCPS are to address the interdependent duties of researchers, institutions and research ethics boards (REB) to research subjects. It indicates the benefits and harms of research shall be fairly distributed with reasonable flexibility in implementation. The document does not offer definitive answers but outlines guiding principles and standards and identifies issues, and points of debate and consensus (TCPS, pp. i.1-i.3). However, as Ellis (2007) states, while these documents offer guidelines, they are usually “grounded on the premise that research is being done on strangers with whom we have no prior relationship or plan for future interaction” (p. 5).

The TCPS (2005) also recognizes the need for research to “alleviate human suffering; to validate theory; to dispel ignorance; to analyze policy; and to understand human behavior and the evolving human condition” (p. i.4). It emphasizes respect for human dignity during the research process with morally acceptable ends. It also emphasizes morally acceptable means to those ends and a harms-benefits analysis in order to minimize harm and maximize benefits for subjects themselves, for other individuals or society as a whole, or for the advancement of knowledge. The intent of my research is to accomplish those goals and it is intended to respect our family, to maintain our dignity and perhaps to reaffirm our dignity in having the courage and determination to tell a very difficult story with respect and consideration for the human condition. It is a story that needs to be told--a story that may be unethical not to tell.

The TPCS (2005) supports the telling of difficult stories by indicating that,

“in evaluating the merit and the scholarly standards of a research proposal, the REB should be concerned with a global assessment of the degree to which the research might further the understanding of a phenomenon, and not be driven by factors such as personal biases or preferences. REBs should not reject research proposals because they are controversial, challenge mainstream thought, or offend powerful or vocal interest groups” (p. 1.6).

My research may challenge mainstream thought, and I hope it does. It may be seen as controversial, and it will probably offend certain people, but the intent is that it will increase the understanding of secrets of mothering and challenge the normative discourse related to mothering and difficult knowledge.

Pat then asks the question, “Did the committee have concerns about the methodology?” The representative from the ethics committee replies, “Quite frankly, we did have a discussion about the scientific merit and rigor of autoethnography.”

Pat is very quick to reply, “Merit and rigor are the responsibility of the student and the supervisors and not the work of the ethics committee.”

The representative nods and replies reassuringly, but not convincingly, “Their hesitation is not with the methodology. I could offer you some time in front of the ethics committee at their next meeting, which is November 2nd, tomorrow. Also there is an appeal process, which has never been invoked thus far.”

I am getting a little more unnerved all the time and I am happy when Debbie replies, “We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the committee tomorrow,” and with that, the

representative leaves but not before handing Pat a letter dated November 1st. Pat reads the letter.

Ethics Office

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Pat Renihan, Dr. Debbie Pushor, and Ms. Lee Murray

Re: Review of Protocol "A Difficult Story to Tell: A Difficult Story to Hear"

Dear Dr. Renihan, Dr. Pushor and Ms. Murray:

Thank you for your submission to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (REB). The full board reviewed the project at its monthly meeting. At that meeting, several very significant concerns were noted that must be addressed before approval can be considered. I want to alert you to the possibility, that given the seriousness of the concerns raised, this project may not be approved.

Our primary ethical concern centres on the ability of the adult son with Down's syndrome to give free and informed consent. If his mental capacity is such that he is not considered legally able to give consent on his own, and his mother gives consent on his behalf, then in our opinion there is an irresolvable conflict of interest involved with the researcher's relationship to the participant. If the participant is able to legally give consent, he remains in a highly conflicted situation. In our opinion, it is impossible for him to withhold consent even if he wished to. We are also concerned that the other adult children will feel pressured to give permission for the thesis to be written. Again, this pressure is a function of the family relationships involved rather than of any intentional overt pressure that the researcher might exert. It is a fundamental requirement of any protocol that each participant must be able to give free and informed consent with no possibility

of coercion. We do not feel that this requirement can be met, given the present structure of the study.

Another significant concern includes the potential psychological stress that the project might cause both the researcher and the participants. The researcher is attempting to mitigate the possibility of unrecognized and unaddressed distress through the involvement of a relative for support to the participants. Unfortunately, the involvement of the relative raises additional concerns particularly around pressure that the researcher's children might feel to continue offering their support for the project. That is, given the family relationship, the REB is concerned that the researcher's children may feel greater pressure to extend their support for the PhD thesis than perhaps would have been the case with a truly neutral third party. At the same time, the REB also recognizes that involving a neutral third party will potentially compromise any hopes of confidentiality or anonymity for the children.

The issue of confidentiality in general is troubling. As the researcher notes, anyone who reads the thesis who is at all familiar with the family will be able to identify the individuals involved, regardless of the use of pseudonyms. Given the nature of the material, coupled with our perception that children of the researcher will feel pressured to grant permission for their story to be told, the REB sees this potential loss of confidentiality as particularly problematic.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. The Board has given this protocol careful consideration, but as the study exists currently, we cannot offer an approval. We would be pleased to discuss this matter further if you require clarification or feel that we have misinterpreted the protocol or overlooked mitigating factors.

The three of us stare at each other for a moment not sure what to say or do. Tomorrow is so soon, and there will definitely be some preparation to do. Maybe it is just as well. If we had to wait until the next monthly meeting of the ethics board, the anxiety would be too much. I will prepare as much as possible but am not sure what else I can do. I am familiar with the ethical guidelines, my purpose, my methodology, and my desire to protect my children, myself and others. I am committed to doing this research as thoughtfully and as diligently as possible and am hoping to answer the questions of the committee as thoughtfully and carefully as possible.

We discuss what we need to do to prepare, and I think back to my comprehensive exam and the preparation I did for that. One of the questions was “Using the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other documents on ethics, identify the particular issues that will arise in your research and how you would address these issues. In your response, address the standards for research done on vulnerable populations.” I remember the discussion that followed this question and in particular free and informed consent.

According to the TCPS (2005), “free and informed consent refers to the dialogue, information sharing and general process through which prospective subjects choose to participate in research,” (p. 2.1) and it is ongoing (free to withdraw). This process includes a comprehensive discussion of the research including harms and benefits. It is also noted “the requirements for free and informed consent should not disqualify research subjects who are not proficient in the language of the researcher” (p. 2.2), but an intermediary should be used in this case.

I understand this and I understand the committee’s concern. They may make the assumption that because Jordan is Down’s syndrome he is not capable of understanding what he is agreeing to. From my perspective, he understands; he understands very well and has supported and encouraged the telling of this story. However, the research proposal also provides for an intermediary (his aunt, a social worker) who will help him understand the implication of his consent. I also understand that this research is determined to be above minimal risk.

Above the threshold of minimal risk refers to research that warrants a higher degree of scrutiny and greater provision for the protection of the interests of the prospective subjects. This provision called “proportionate review is intended to reserve most intensive scrutiny to the most challenging research; . . . it implies different levels of review for different research proposals . . .

Proportionate review begins with the assessment from the viewpoint of the potential subject” (TCPS, 2005, p. 1.7), and provisions are made for discussion between the researcher(s) and the REB. It will be important to inform the committee of Jordan’s level of function and competence tomorrow and to help them understand that he is capable of making this decision and understanding the consequences of his decision.

According to the TCPS, competence “involves the ability to understand the information presented, to appreciate the potential consequences of a decision, and to provide free and informed consent . . . It does not require the capacity to make every kind of decision. It requires [the subject] be competent to make informed decisions regarding participation in the research study (p. 2.9).

According to *Merriam Webster’s Dictionary of Law*, the legal definition of incompetence is the lack of ability, legal qualification or fitness to manage one’s own affairs (n.d). Historically, incompetence before the law has been associated with mental illness or mental deficit and an assumption of global incompetence was usually made (Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), 2009). Jurisdictions are now less inclined to embrace global incompetence and instead focus on narrow task and specific competencies e.g. ability to care for self, make a will, stand trial, manage own finances, and give consent (CPA). It is important to seek to balance the vulnerability that arises from their incompetence and the injustice that would arise from their exclusion from the benefits of research (TCPS, 2005).

If we restrict research involving people with cognitive challenges, one of the most vulnerable populations will be denied the possible benefits of research. Strict application of the principles of free and informed consent would deny incompetent individuals many of the

benefits of research participation, either directly or indirectly. In a sense, such beneficence-based reasoning and practices intentionally exclude certain groups from research. In attempting to avoid the moral problem of exploiting vulnerable research subjects, such practices may incur the moral problem that individuals in need of the benefits of research may be denied them” (p. 5.1). Also “whether intentional or inadvertent, the exclusion of some from the benefits of research violates the commitment to societal justice. Researchers shall not exclude prospective or actual research subjects on the basis of such attributes as culture, religion, race, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, sex or age, unless there is valid reason for doing so” (TCPS, 2005, p. 5.2).

TCPS (2005) indicates groups that have been “disadvantaged in the context of research include women, people of color or of different ethnicity, the elderly, children and restricted or dependent people” (p. 5.3). “Although ethical duties to vulnerable people preclude the exploitation of those who are incompetent to consent . . . there is an obligation to conduct research involving such people because it is unjust to exclude them from the benefits that can be expected from research” (p. 5.4). There is a need for research that involves people who are not able to consent for themselves because they are “unique individuals who command respect, justice, and inclusiveness that are accorded competent individuals” (p. 5.4).

I believe that Jordan is competent to make this decision, but this does not preclude all safety measures from being in place. But the question remains, even if he was deemed incompetent, should the research be prevented from going forward? Would it prevent the discussion of issues--difficult issues--experienced by people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations? Would it deny Jordan and others the benefits of research?

Confidentiality, anonymity and privacy will also be areas we will need to be prepared to discuss. Privacy and confidentiality are constitutional rights protected by federal and provincial statutes that indicate that private information must be treated in a respectful and confidential manner. The TCPS also states that, when we are considering who can be included in research, we need to ask if “the overall benefits and burdens of research are distributed fairly and [if] disadvantaged individuals and groups will receive a fair share of the benefits of research” (p. 5.1). According to distributive justice, individuals and groups should neither bear unfair burdens of participating in research nor be unfairly excluded from the potential benefits of inclusion.

Support for those involved in my research is also important and I feel I have answered this in the proposal in respect to putting a number of safeguards in place. I have asked my sister-in-law, an experienced social worker/therapist, to be available to my children for support. She is easily accessible by phone or in person. She has developed a trusting relationship with them over the years, and she will have their best interest in mind. Other professionals were considered to fulfill this role, but my doctoral committee and I agreed that, considering all variables, she would be in the best position to contribute the necessary support. The informed consent from my children will also be obtained by her. She will frequently confirm the family members’ ongoing access to my written work and their ongoing negotiation of the research text, in particular the text that may contain their quotations or reference to them.

We continue to discuss the issues and try to guess what some of the questions may be. We consider the three main concerns of the committee very carefully and think each one through, trying to establish possible solutions.

Pat is unable to attend the meeting the next day, but Debbie is able to attend with me. I am confident she will support and promote the importance of this work, and she will encourage the committee to facilitate the progress of this research. I have no reason for optimism at this point, yet I feel that somehow my story will be told. I feel resolved that it will happen one way or another. I read my proposal again and wonder if I will have the opportunity to change it or modify it to meet the requirements of the ethics committee without losing the intent and purpose of the research. Maybe I have been too candid and upfront. I read the introduction to the proposal once again:

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Application for Approval of Research Protocol

Name of Co-Supervisors: Dr. Pat Renihan and Dr. Debbie Pushor

Name of Student: B. Lee Murray

Title of Study: A Difficult Story To Tell: A Difficult Story To Hear

Abstract:

I did not successfully teach my son how to protect himself against sexual abuse and I missed the signs and symptoms of abuse. I was also not prepared for the disclosure or the emotional turmoil and hurt that followed. In my research into this experience, I will use autoethnography, and more specifically evocative narrative, to tell a story that needs to be told. A story about something that is often a secret. A story that stirs up emotion in the reader. A story that may encourage others to think differently about sexual abuse and children with developmental disabilities, and ultimately to do something different. I want my story to be both “engaging and evocative.”

Autoethnographic stories, stories that focus on the self in social context, are a powerful form to connect social science to literature, academic interests to personal ones, emotions to cognition, and social life to the concrete living of it (Ellis, 1995). Autoethnographic accounts open an important avenue to exploring the intricacies of intimate communication that are left out or ignored in most social science research (Ellis, 2000). It is important to reframe narrative voices in ways that open up social science discourse to a larger and more varied audience, that make social science more useful, that allow for the silenced voices of others, and the silenced parts of ourselves to speak themselves, and that challenge the “oppressive structures that create the conditions of silence” (Tierney, 1993). We must hear the voices of those who have lived the experience. The stories of our own individual experiences with sexual abuse, through self-advocacy and the advocacy of others, must be told and heard in a way that evokes meaning, understanding, and the will to act.

As I read this over and over, I begin to understand the committee's concern.

This is difficult knowledge. It is not easy to discuss and it does make us feel uncomfortable. The disclosure and inquiry regarding childhood sexual abuse may be disturbing for some; however, it may force people to examine a topic they have avoided or found difficult to think about. Also, reading autoethnography may affect the reader in a way so-called “scientific” research does not. It may challenge them to care about something or someone and to be connected to a world they are not familiar with or they didn’t know existed. Perhaps the sexual abuse is more destructive when it remains concealed. There is a vulnerability associated with the disclosure of any secret, in particular the disclosure of sexual abuse of a vulnerable population such as children with developmental disabilities. It has risks, but it also has benefits.

This research has the potential for personal, practical, and social benefits. Inquiry into my story is therapeutic not only for me and my family but also for others. It may help others to understand and cope.

This research also has the potential to encourage parents of children with developmental disabilities to begin sexual health education early, or it may encourage parents who didn't start this education early to start now. Perhaps it will connect and support parents who have suffered from the pain of learning their child has been sexually abused. The traditional approach of academia to attempt to take an objective, detached, and unemotional view of human experience has not resulted in an effective change in policies to protect children. It has not encouraged schools to recognize that if they see children with developmental disabilities as vulnerable then they need to find ways to change that. If research doesn't make a difference or promote positive change, what is its purpose?

I read Carolyn Ellis' work and I hope, in front of the committee, I will be even marginally as articulate as she is. It gives me confidence in myself and my chosen methodology when I read her work.

Ellis (2004) identified two students in Canada and a student in the United States who had a similar experience to mine attempting to receive ethical approval for research involving vulnerable populations (family) using autoethnography as methodology. She talks about students regrettably having to use fiction or pen names in order to meet the requirements of REBs (Research Ethics Boards) and to protect the university from being sued based on a violation of privacy. But are fiction and pen names the answer? I certainly don't want to do either. However, I also do not think that the university is at risk for action against them from my family.

The issue still remains about free and informed consent within a family context and the assumption of power. And how do we protect anonymity of intimate others in a story when the author is known? According to Ellis (2004), each project must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and we have to do our part in educating people who serve on ethics boards about the work we do. She indicates that this may mean “refusing to hide what it is we do” (p. 261). The privilege of writing our own story “comes with complex responsibilities toward other characters in (our) narratives” (Ellis, p. 261).

We end our meeting and I wonder what tomorrow will bring. I read that evening and I think, ponder and question but not for long; Jordan has plans. I am tired and “lazy” (according to Jordan), but he reminds me he hasn’t seen me for a week. Jordan is a planner and he keeps me quite busy for the evening and I forget about the challenges and messiness of this research, if only briefly. I fall asleep later, exhausted.

The next morning is another beautiful fall day; however, I hardly notice. I know it is warm enough not to wear a coat but the beauty of the day is wasted on me. I have not slept well, and I feel irritated with myself for worrying so much, but this research is so important to me; I don’t want to run into another road block. I see Debbie standing in front of Place Riel talking with some of her students. They are chatting and laughing and I want to laugh too. Debbie has a dress on and red boots. She looks great and I know I must look terrible.

I feel stressed but not anxious. My heart should be beating at 200/minute but it’s not. I feel uptight but have no signs of helpful adrenaline surging through my veins. Maybe I am just too tired. Maybe, on days like today, I doubt myself and what I am doing. Maybe the

pain of my experience is too much with all these difficulties layered on top. It would be much easier to give up and surrender. Maybe it is the realization that I won't surrender that keeps me going.

I comment to Debbie how surreal this moment feels and she concurs. At this moment I don't know how to think, feel or act. It seems like I am just going through the motions, yet in a few minutes, I will be required to defend my proposal to a group of people who may not understand the complexities of autoethnography and the resulting ethical issues.

Debbie and I are ushered into the meeting by a representative of the committee, and we both take a deep breath. Now my heart is starting to pound. Members of the committee introduce themselves and Debbie writes their names down and I don't recall her writing down anything else after that. We are both listening, thinking and concentrating so hard, trying to answer the questions in the most respectful yet persistent way possible.

Sitting here in front of the ethics committee, I wonder who they see when they look at me. Do they see a researcher? Do they see a student? Do they see a colleague, a fellow faculty member? Do they see a nurse? And most importantly, do they see a mother? A mother whose son has been sexually abused. A mother who has taken many risks to tell this story and a mother who will take many more risks before the story is told in a public realm. Do they understand that I am multiple selves? When they talk to me as a researcher, they also talk to me as a mother. Their objective and detached questions do not fit in my mother ears. I come to this meeting in ways they do not understand. And they come in ways that I do not understand. Do they see themselves as only committee members at this moment or as fellow

researchers, colleagues, and perhaps parents? (Is this a depersonalizing job or is it a requirement?). My wondering stops as a committee member reviews the three main concerns: free and informed consent, confidentiality/anonymity and support for my children.

The committee seems very concerned about Jordan's capabilities, level of function and literacy. I attempt to reassure the committee by saying, "Jordan is quite independent. He has paid employment, rides the bus independently and has qualified for a learner's driver's license. He is capable of making his own decisions and he most definitely has a point of view." They seem to like to hear this. There appears to be a connection made that if he knows how to ride the bus, he will be able to say No (or perhaps Yes) to the research. I wonder if I should have said more, but I already feel as if I am degrading Jordan in some way.

They are also concerned about my other two adult children and their ability to say "No." They ask, "Who will get the consent from your children?" I answer, "I have discussed this with my sister-in-law as I have indicated in the proposal and she is willing to take that responsibility. She has my children's best interest in mind. She is easily accessible by phone or in person. She has developed a trusting relationship with them over the years and she will have their best interest in mind (I think I already said that). She is also an experienced social worker/therapist and would be capable of recognizing, hearing, and communicating any concerns or issues that may arise. She will obtain an informed consent from each of my children, and they will have access to my written work at all points in time upon their request and will be part of the ongoing negotiation of the research text, in particular the text that may contain their quotations or references to them. My prime consideration is to protect

my children." I realize I am babbling and I am out of breath. I need to slow down and answer their questions more briefly and to the point, and besides they do not look very satisfied with my answer.

One member asks, "What measures do you have in place to provide support for your children during the research?" I indicate, "My sister-in-law has agreed to fulfill that role. She has many years of counseling experience and would be very capable in this role. She is already someone my children would identify as supportive and someone they would seek out if they needed support or someone to talk to." Many around the table frown, and I realize that this is an issue as well.

Support for me is not actually addressed. Another member asks, "How do you propose to keep others anonymous in your research?" Again I refer to the proposal and reply, "I plan to use pseudonyms for other characters and I will also disguise time and place." They ask again, "How will you protect the identification of people who are not involved directly in your research? Did Jordan go to more than one school?" Suddenly, I realize they may be concerned about keeping the (alleged) perpetrator and school anonymous. Perhaps they are concerned I want to expose him. I wonder if they realize they may be protecting the (alleged) perpetrator. It was never my intention to identify the (alleged) perpetrator or the school, but keeping this story a secret, keeping it from being told is protecting the (alleged) perpetrator.

What kind of protection does our family need? We need support, but do we need protection? What is our need for secrecy? What do we have to hide? Jordan and our family have already been hurt. It is too late for protection for us. Telling the story is not going to be

worse than the experience. In fact, it may help heal the wounds for all of us. I want to shout out what Carolyn Ellis (2007) has asked: "Is the wellbeing of the researcher always less important than the wellbeing of the other, even others who have behaved badly?" (p. 31). I want to say, "If I had wanted him exposed, there are lots of ways I could have done that by now." But at the same time, I am asking myself, "Why haven't I tried to expose him? Is it because of others' warnings regarding the consequences exposure may have for me and my family?"

I am starting to feel hot in this stuffy room. I am starting to feel impatient and I don't know what more they want to hear. I don't think I look impatient or sound impatient, but I look at Debbie briefly to see if she is concerned about what I am saying. She appears as composed as ever but also very intent.

Another member states, "I have real concerns about this research. It is very difficult to assume free and informed consent, anonymity, privacy, protection and confidentiality in this type of research." I reply, "I agree. Procedural ethics is very important and some very important considerations need to be made. We need to be very thoughtful about how we address each of these issues. But we also need to be concerned with situational ethics (those unexpected situations that arise) and relational ethics. I am wondering if I could refer to the work of Ellis regarding relational ethics."

The committee nods but still appears skeptical. I continue, "According to Ellis (2007), relational ethics is concerned with caring, mutual respect and dignity and recognizing the connectedness and often intimacy that exists between the researcher and the participants--in this case, between me and my children, who are characters in my story." I stop for a moment

and recognize some confusion on the faces of the committee members, but some members are nodding and others seem to be pondering this information.

I continue, "The question Ellis (2007) encourages us to ask is 'what are our ethical responsibilities toward intimate others who are implicated in the stories we write about ourselves?' " (p. 4). I go on, "My research doesn't fit strictly within the procedural ethics standards but needs to be considered in the context of research that is connected with intimate others. Considerations will need to be made about how I can tell my story while still protecting them from harm." I look at the committee and ask, "Does this make sense to you?" Some nod; others stare.

Debbie suggests, "It may also be useful to look at autoethnographical studies that have been approved at other universities across Canada using the TCPS as a guide as well." There is no response so Debbie continues, "There have been a number of universities across Canada who have found similar research acceptable on ethical grounds, in particular the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education associated with the University of Toronto and the University of Alberta. Methodologies included autoethnography, memoir, and autobiography where free and informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality must have been part of the discussion at the ethics table as well as between the student and her/his committee. Can we look for guidance from other Canadian universities who are more familiar with narrative forms of research and the implications and particular ethical issues that may arise?"

The ethics board members nod, but no suggestion is made to follow through with this suggestion. I think it is a wonderful suggestion and it is probably also an attempt for Debbie

to vent some of her frustration in a democratic and reasonable way. I understand how she must be feeling. It feels like a "do or die" situation. We have this one chance to convince the board of the importance of this research and the possibilities to facilitate it happening. This may be our last chance to help them understand. Debbie has already said that we need to approach this meeting as an opportunity for education and information. A member of the committee asks if there is anything else I want to say. I have many things I want to say--many things I don't know how to say, but I merely say, "I hope we can work together to facilitate this work." Debbie indicates she agrees and thanks the board for inviting us to their meeting. The committee thanks us for coming and indicates they will be in touch. Debbie and I leave nodding, saying thank you and feeling quite unsettled.

Debbie and I get our coats and put them on in silence. We are alone but there is a sense that we need to leave this building before we can speak. The moment we get outside, we begin to review every aspect of the meeting and try to make sense of it. Most of all, we reassure each other that we did a good job and we continue to carry on the conversation in depth and in doing so we hope to reassure ourselves that the research will go forward. We know that we had some support in the room particularly from someone who indicated they had experience with this type of research. As we part, Debbie, being the supportive co-chair that she is, reassures me that things will work out and I, being the good student that I am, try to believe her. She waves and says, "We'll be in touch."

The next day Debbie is in touch, and she indicates a representative of the ethics committee has just called her. She tells me, "The representative began the telephone

conversation by stating that the board members asked themselves if they would ever be comfortable with autoethnography and with someone who had experienced a traumatic encounter? But it was also indicated that they did not want to stop this type of research."

Debbie continues, "The committee is still concerned about the consent/assent and wondered if I would be willing and if I thought it appropriate to be the agent to talk to your adult children and get consent from them. What do you think, Lee? The committee also thought it was important for me to make it clear that consent was completely voluntary, and I was encouraged to explicitly tell them that their not wanting to participate would not imperil your ability to get a PhD."

I think about this and to me it seems rather odd, but I want to hear the rest of the story. Debbie continues but with a gentler tone, "The representative indicated he was disconcerted with your response Lee to his question during the meeting when he asked you 'what if your children aren't interested in participating?' and you replied, 'It has been a family decision; therefore, I would be very surprised if they were not interested.'" "Apparently," Debbie goes on, "the committee wants me to speak to each of your children individually to make sure that I receive free and informed consent for each of them without influence from the others or from you."

I hear what Debbie is saying and I wonder what she thinks about this. I am trying to get my head around the fact that the assumption is that my children will be more capable of making a free and informed decision if someone who is a stranger to them discusses it with them rather than someone they have grown to know and trust. I may be missing something,

but my experience as a nurse and family therapist tells me that children (even adult children) will be more likely to make an independent decision in the presence of someone they trust rather than a stranger. I am wondering what assumptions are behind the committee's recommendations.

Debbie goes on to say, "The representative indicates that support also remains an issue. The committee has decided that your sister-in-law may be appropriate as the support person, but there will need to be a backup plan and another therapist available if need be. He also said that, when the children sign the consent form, they are to be perfectly clear that there will be a loss of confidentiality and he added all other identities must be protected." I'm sure my children realize that their identity will be known and I will protect others' identity as much as possible or, at the very least, make them aware that they are characters in the story and may be recognizable.

"There are also other recommendations," Debbie says. "These include spelling things out more clearly in the proposal, identifying the research question and naming any family archival material you may be using as data." Debbie adds, "The revisions will need to be completed as soon as possible, Lee, if we want the proposal reviewed at the upcoming December meeting. I told him we could make the revisions and he indicated a letter will follow shortly." Debbie concludes.

I welcome the opportunity to rewrite the proposal because Debbie and I both realize that in some ways we were naïve about the process when I prepared the first proposal--naïve regarding the impact of such a straightforward and upfront approach. I can accept the

changes that are recommended without feeling that I have compromised myself or the research project. I have learned a lot during this journey and I can speak the language requested such as "data, research question, and agent to obtain consent," if only momentarily. I am happy to have Debbie as the agent to obtain consent. I don't understand it but it is workable. I am happy to name a backup therapist for myself and my children. I am happy to provide more clarity. I wonder if the board will ever be comfortable with a/e and research that addresses someone who has experienced a traumatic encounter. I don't know if that comfort will come to the board. I don't think we should feel comfortable with pain and suffering, but I don't believe that avoidance will heal the suffering or address the issues. Perhaps comfort never comes with trauma but perhaps hope and understanding may come from sharing.

The letter arrives in a few days.

Ethics Office

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Pat Renihan, Dr. Debbie Pushor, and Ms. Lee Murray

Re: Review of Protocol "A Difficult Story to Tell: A Difficult Story to Hear"

Dear Dr. Renihan, Dr. Pushor and Ms. Murray:

Thank you for coming in to speak with the Board at our meeting on the 2nd of November. We appreciate you having had taken the time to consider our concerns and the patience you have shown as we work through the issues of concern to the Board. The REB believes that our ethical review processes must be sufficiently flexible so as to allow this project, and autoethnographies in general, to go forward.

After having discussed the responses to our concerns, the Board offers the following suggestions as a way of allowing this research to proceed.

The first is in regards to obtaining consent from the children of the researcher. The REB requests that Dr. Pushor meet with the adult children on an individual basis and obtain the required consent. Although this is an unusual approach, we feel that Dr. Pushor could explain to the children the process of giving informed consent and credibly remove from them the pressure they may feel because of their mother's involvement. In particular, it is important that the children not feel that the possibility of their mother successfully completing her PhD hinges on this choice of thesis topic: if one or more of the children are not comfortable with the topic, the researcher can identify another topic, or another approach to this topic which will not involve the children. The consent form should also remove from the children the obligation to read the thesis if they do not wish to: the children should be given an opportunity to read and respond to the thesis but should not be required to do so. Finally, concerning confidentiality, it is essential that the children are aware that their confidentiality cannot be maintained and that they consent to this loss of confidentiality.

You will recall that the REB was concerned about the sister-in-law of the researcher being designated as the support person for the researcher and the children. On the other hand, we were also concerned about the loss of confidentiality if an outside person was involved. The Board appreciates that the children may be most comfortable going to the aunt if they become distressed by the study so will not restrict that possibility. We would request, though, that the aunt identify (a) professional support person(s) to refer either the children or the researcher to in the event that any of them experience significant distress. The children should also know that if they are not comfortable speaking to the aunt, for whatever reason, they can simply contact a counselor or other professional who can assist them. This is also important for the children should they decide at any point that they no longer consent to the research or that they no longer want to read or be involved in the writing of the dissertation.

The final major issue the REB discussed with you was overall confidentiality. As noted above, it does not seem possible to protect the confidentiality of the children so they will need to acknowledge that fact and agree to it in the consent form. For

all other people that will be discussed in the dissertation, it is necessary that the thesis be written in such a way as to protect their anonymity.

In order to grant approval for this protocol, the REB requires a redrafted application that takes into consideration the suggestions and requirements included in this letter. Additionally, we would request that the revised application identify more precisely the research question and the parameters around the researcher's life story implied by the research question. Also, if the researcher is planning on utilizing archival data, e.g. family photos or diaries, that fact should be indicated in the application.

The next meeting of the full REB is December 1. If you are able to have your revisions to our office by November 27, we would include your protocol on the agenda of that meeting. Again, let me thank you for the very helpful and positive attitude you have brought to these discussions. We look forward to your response.

I read the letter and it basically defines what was said in the telephone conversation between Debbie and the representative of the ethics committee. I certainly hope my revised proposal meets the requirements of the committee because identifying another topic at this point along the journey would definitely create problems for me. The exploration of the secrets of mothering or anything to do with mothering would be nearly impossible to consider without the involvement of my children. Perhaps I need to address a broader focus in the proposal. Rather than addressing the major issue head-on, I will take a broader perspective related to secrets of mothering and perhaps disturb the normative discourse that defines mothering.

I then work with Debbie and Pat to develop a new proposal. I am happy with the result. The proposal now reflects the intent of my research without taking away from what I want to accomplish, and hopefully it will also meet the requirements of the ethics committee. It has been over a month now--a month of uncertainty, a month of rethinking, negotiating and

struggling--struggling to open a door, struggling to remain positive and struggling to clear a path without stumbling and falling. I look at the revised proposal and wonder what the response will be.

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Application for Approval of Research Protocol

Name of Co-Supervisors: Dr. Pat Renihan and Dr. Debbie Pushor

Name of Student: B. Lee Murray

Title of Study: Secrets of Mothering: A Difficult Story To Tell: A Difficult Story To Hear

Abstract:

This research study will describe, explore and analyze my own personal and professional experiences and perceptions as a mother, nurse-therapist, and advocate for children with developmental disabilities. In my research into this experience, I will use autoethnography, and more specifically evocative narrative. Data will be constituted from my memory, recollection, and reflection. Family artifacts will be used to stimulate retrospective thinking. No interviews or observation will be used to collect data.

The overarching research focus will include the examination of three main areas: 1) inquiry into mothering; 2) exploration and analysis of my life situations, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings; and 3) inquiry into secrets and difficult knowledge and how we learn to talk about difficult topics such as developmental disabilities, sexual abuse, divorce, accidents, and illness.

The research process will seek to answer the following question: What can be learned and understood from this multilayered exploration and analysis of my personal and professional experiences as a mother, advocate, and clinical nurse specialist?

Funding:

Unfunded and in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a PhD at the University of Saskatchewan.

Expertise:

I am positioned multiply in relation to this research. I am a Clinical Nurse Specialist in adolescent mental health and have been employed as an individual and family therapist working with children of alcoholics and suicidal adolescents and their families. I am also involved in teaching, clinical practice, and research regarding child and adolescent mental health. My clinical teaching has included practice with children and adolescents with developmental disabilities. I am also a parent of a child with Down's syndrome and have been involved in early intervention programs, Saskatchewan Association for Community Living, and Special Olympics. I am also a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.

Conflict of Interest:

An informed consent will be obtained from each of my family members, most central to the research, by an intermediary, my co-supervisor, Dr. Debbie Pushor, Department of Curriculum Studies. My family members will have access to my written work at all points in time upon their request and will be invited to be part of the ongoing negotiation of the research text in particular the text that may contain their quotes or reference to them. They will be given

an opportunity individually to read and respond to the text and will have the right to decline.

There will be no financial benefits or other incentives for family members. There are no perceived limitations on publication or distribution.

Participants:

No participants will be enrolled in the study as it is framed as a self-narrative. Therefore, there will be no procedures for recruiting, selecting or assigning participants. Utilizing the methodology of autoethnography, my three children and I will be most central to the research. My three children are adults, aged 20, 26, and 29. Free and informed consent will be obtained from all three children. The consents will be obtained by Dr. Debbie Pushor. Please see next section re: consent.

Recruitment Material: N/A**Consent:**

Please refer to consent form, Appendix A.

I will seek informed consent from my 3 adult children, not for assuming the role of research participant but only to have my family acknowledge and consent to the study as an inquiry into a family story written from my perspective as a mother. The consent will also reflect their awareness and acknowledgement of their loss of anonymity and confidentiality as a result of their relationship to me. My youngest child is 20 years old and Down's syndrome. He is functionally and workplace literate and has graduated from high school with a modified grade 12. He also has a learner driver's license. He is part of a work/education program at a contemporary eatery and has received very positive feedback from his employer. His primary role is busing and he also fills in as an auxiliary host. An intermediary, Dr. Debbie Pushor, will

obtain consent from my three adult children. She will, at regular intervals, confirm the family members' ongoing access to my written work and their ongoing negotiation of the research text in particular the text that may contain their quotations or reference to them.

Methods/Procedures:

Data will be constituted from my memory, recollection, and reflection. No interviews or observation will be used to collect data.

Storage of Data:

Any materials constituted as data will be stored in my supervisor's office, at the University of Saskatchewan, for a minimum of five years.

Dissemination of Results:

PhD Dissertation, Scholarly and Artistic Works, Conference Presentations and Papers.

Risk, Benefits, and Deception:**Possible Benefits**

This research has the potential for personal, practical, and social benefits. The research is also meant to promote appreciation for the human experience and challenge and shift practices around the subjects of developmental disabilities, sexual abuse, divorce, accidents, and illness. It is intended to create discussion of difficult issues, difficult knowledge, vulnerabilities, the imbalance of power, and our individual and societal responsibility to think, feel, care and act.

Possible Risks

Research of this nature may have an emotional impact on the family. My sister-in-law, a social worker/therapist, will be available to my children for debriefing and support. She has developed a trusting relationship with them over the years and is an experienced social

worker/therapist. She is easily accessible by phone or in person. Dr. Stephen Boechler, a Registered Clinical Psychologist, will also be available, to me and my family, for support upon request.

Confidentiality:

Although there will be no participants enrolled in the study, references to persons, places, and events will be generalized and no names of people and locales will be used in the retrospective writing for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality. As one element of the autoethnography, it is important to note, that the sexual abuse is already in the public domain and considerable time has elapsed since its occurrence and disclosure. Family members most central to the research will also be identifiable based on their relationship to me. They will be made aware that their confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured and they will consent to this loss of confidentiality. All measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of other individuals in the study. These individuals or places will be given a pseudonym and all identifying information will be masked or removed.

Data/Transcript Release: N/A

Debriefing and Feedback: There will be an opportunity for my family to give constant feedback regarding the research text. There will also be an opportunity to read the final text. They will have the right to decline if they wish.

The revised proposal is sent before the deadline, and we wait once again.

On December 4th an email arrives from the Ethics Officer. It reads:

Date: November

To: Lee Murray

Cc. Pat Renihan; Debbie Pushor

From: BehREB

Subject: Ethics application

Good morning,

Thank-you for your revised ethics application. Your revisions were reviewed at our December 1st meeting and the Behavioural Research Ethics Board is pleased with the changes you have made. With regards to the new application there is one final revision the Beh REB would ask before granting approval. This revision is in regards to the fact that the children are not, in fact, participants. For this reason, the Beh REB would recommend that the wording in the consent form be changed to reflect that consent is being given, not for participation in the research but to support the project. It is suggested by the Beh REB that the final paragraph of the consent form be reworded to say "Consent to support the research" and that the second sentence of this paragraph be reworded in the same manner. Some revisions will also be required in the "Right to withdraw" section for the same reason.

Thank-you for this small change and for all your patience through this process. Your willingness to listen to the concerns of the Beh REB and to try to accommodate our request is appreciated.

Regards,

Ethics Officer/Office of Vice-President Research

Debbie replies:

Date: November

To: BehREB

From: Debbie Pushor

Subject: Re: Ethics application

Thank-you for your note. We're very pleased to have the approval of the Ethics Board. We will make the minor changes and get the revisions to you quickly. Thanks for your input and the opportunity to have these very important research conversations.

Sincerely, Debbie

I send the revised consent form the next day.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

[THE LANGUAGE OF THIS DOCUMENT MAY BE ADJUSTED OR THOUGHTFULLY EXPLAINED TO MEET THE READABILITY OF ANY OF THE PARTICIPANTS]

Researcher(s): B. Lee Murray, College of Nursing (Faculty), College of Education (PhD student), University of Saskatchewan.

Purpose and Procedure: I will use autoethnography, and more specifically evocative narrative, to tell my story about our family experiences over the past few years. You will be an individual in that story. Data will be constituted from my memory, recollection, and reflection. Family artifacts such as photographs, journals, personal emails and letters between family members and friends will be used to encourage retrospective thinking. No interviews or observation will be used to collect data.

Potential Risks: Research of this nature may have an emotional impact on you. Your non-biological aunt, Marianne Murray, a social worker/therapist, will be available to you for support throughout the process of the research and will confirm your ongoing willingness to be part of the research. Dr. Stephen Boechler, a Registered Clinical Psychologist, will also be available for support upon request.

Potential Benefits: This research has the potential for personal, practical, and social benefits. The research is also meant to promote appreciation for the human experience and challenge and shift practices around the subjects of developmental disabilities, sexual abuse, divorce, accidents, and illness.

Storage of Data: Any materials constituted as data will be stored in a locked file in my co-supervisor's office, Dr. Debbie Pushor, Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, for a minimum of five years.

Confidentiality: The results will be disseminated through the PhD dissertation, scholarly works, and conference presentations. Because of your relationship to me, your identity will be known. You will have access to read the story at any time upon request, and you will have the opportunity to delete any reference to yourself if requested. You are not required to read the research text if you so choose.

Right to Withdraw: Your support for the study is voluntary. You will have access to my written work at all points in time upon your request and will be invited to be part of the ongoing negotiation of the research text in particular the text that may contain your quotes or reference to you. You will be given an opportunity to read and respond to the text but will have the right to decline. If you withdraw your consent to support this research study, your contributions or descriptions of you will not be included in the research text.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact my co-supervisor, Dr. Debbie Pushor (966-7573 or 374-4356). This

study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights in support of the study may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084).

Consent to Support the Study: I have read and understand the description provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to support this study as an inquiry into a family story written from the perspective of my mother. I understand there will be an opportunity for me to give constant feedback regarding the research text. I will also have an opportunity to read the final text and will have the right to decline if I wish. I also understand that I may withdraw this consent to support the research project at any time and as a result any reference to me or descriptions of me will not be included in the research text. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

It arrives December 10th. It is a one-page document. It is a form letter. It is simple and to the point. It is the certificate of approval. One simple page that means so much to autoethnography and other forms of narrative research and to future researchers "of like mind" who may have a smoother journey.

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Patrick Renihan

DEPARTMENT
Educational Administration

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
B. Lee Murray

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED (STUDY SITE)
University of Saskatchewan

SPONSOR
UNFUNDED

TITLE
Secrets of Mothering: A Difficult Story To Tell: A Difficult Story To Hear

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility

for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions:

APPROVED

Upon further reflection on the ethics approval process and a desire for transparency, a representative of the ethics committee was invited to read this chapter. It was read with interest and support. The original concerns of the ethics committee were reflective of the procedural ethical issues I discussed with my supervisors on an ongoing basis. Additional procedural considerations included my decision to obtain informed consent to support the project from my mom, my son Dave and Dr. Tomasulo. I was also conscious and diligent to maintain the anonymity of other characters in my stories. My family and I made use of psychological support on an ongoing basis to address any issues that arose as this writing unfolded. Situational and relational ethical considerations were an important part of the ongoing negotiation of the text. The ethics approval process unfolded as a shared teaching and learning experience and became very educative for all concerned.

EPILOGUE

Perhaps we will find that place...that place, where in the end, we can write our secret lives into stories of mythic proportions, stories that matter.

Chris Poulos (2009, p. 198).

Writing this epilogue is bittersweet. Of course, it feels wonderful to be at this point of completion in my work. However, it also means an ending to my regular meetings with Pat and Debbie. And at the moment, the sadness related to the ending overshadows the joy of near completion. I am wondering if this dissertation is an ending or merely a beginning.

I am back in the dungeon. My trusty old relic of a computer brings me some degree of calm. I have been encouraged to ditch her for the new laptop on the kitchen desk but I refuse. We have been through so much together and we have a degree of trust that goes beyond speed and efficiency.

I am attempting to put together a presentation for my dissertation defense and I do not know where to start. I want to be creative so it fits with the style of my dissertation but creativity feels beyond my reach.

I have been reading my dissertation over and over the last few days and I reflect on the process but also on the stories. What do they mean to me now? How do they speak to me? How will they speak to others? As I chose my stories I chose stories that spoke to the marginalized maternal voice (single moms, illegitimate moms, too busy moms, guilty, shameful, self-blaming and hurting moms).

I read Chapter I "Tomasulo's chair" and I feel the back and forth, the in and out, the living, the re-living, the connecting and the disconnecting and I realize I don't disconnect as much. Maybe I don't feel the need to dissociate as much or perhaps I look at things differently or perhaps I cope in other ways. This is the first chapter and yet it is the chapter that brings me the most hope. It has brought my mom and me closer; it has opened up discussion between us: it has acknowledged my secrets of mothering and affirmed that they have come from somewhere. It takes me back to a place in time that shook me from my branches to my roots. But also a place in time when I realized that I could write, that I wanted to write, that writing brought understanding, that writing brought insight, that writing brought hope and possibility and writing brought healing for me and perhaps also the reader. Sometimes I just want to stay with this chapter but I move on and let myself melt into Chapter II.

"Down on the farm" still pulls me in many directions as I read it. I don't want to go back to that space and have to do that again but I also want to go back to that space and do it again in a different way. I want my kids to be little again and I want to parent in a different way. I want to relax, I want to let go and I want to know that it is okay not to do it all. But I also want to take this young mom, I read about, and give her a hug...a big hug. I want to tell her what I know and what I still do not know. I want to play with her and her kids. I want to see her laugh and be silly. I want to hold her face in my hands, look into her eyes and tell her that she can let go of those preconceived ideas of how she should be and just "be". She is my daughter's age and she had so many responsibilities and so many things she thought she needed to worry about. And she did her best.

I contrast her with the “academic mom” and I see so many similarities. The discourse of rural moms at that time is so similar to the discourse of academic moms. But when I read the “academic mom” piece, I want to shake her and say, “Haven’t you learned anything? Why are you still so busy?” but I also want to say, “I am so glad you did this work...it was worth the time, the energy, the sacrifice...it is thoughtful work, it will be appreciated work...you did okay and your children are okay despite your struggles, worries, concerns and “bad” mother characteristics and maybe because of them. I read on and I realize how stuck in the discourse I was (maybe still am). I also feel I can step back for a moment when I read Chapter III “Discourse and Practice of Mothering” and reflect without the emotion and the intensity I feel with the previous chapters. It gives me a chance to regroup and think. I hope it gives an opportunity for the reader to step to the side for a moment and think about what they have read without the emotion and intensity; to reflect on the meaning the stories may have for them in relation to their own lives and experiences, and the discourse that plays in their heads. I wonder what stories may be brought forth for them. When I read a chapter sometimes I read as if I am a first time reader and I try to envision what I would think; what the reader may think of my work. It often brings forth more stories for me, new and different stories.

But as I move on to the secrets of “single mothering” I am pulled back into the emotions and the struggles of sole parenting, and the stigma surrounding it. Single mothering is often seen as “other” mothering. Single mothering still holds a stigma in society whether by choice or not. When I read this chapter I realize how connected my identity

as a divorced woman was to that of a single mom. I was worried about what people thought. I made an assumption that I was seen as a failure. I felt I had failed at a marriage with my children's father and therefore I was a failure as a mother as well; I thought a happy heterosexual marriage was the only way to provide "good" parenting. I realize also how invisible my ex-husband was in the story and how invisible he was in my life at that time.

When I read about the "illegitimate mom" now, I want to be her nurse. I want to soothe her and relieve her pain, both physically and emotionally. I want to give her space and encouragement to love and care for her baby. I want to prepare her for the loss and despair she is going to feel and I want to support her decision to give her baby away. She is so young and yet I can tell she has put so much time, emotional energy, blood, sweat and tears into making this decision. I want to tell her she is brave, that she is not a bad girl but a hurting girl and that I will do what ever I can to meet her needs at the moment. I want to tell her that I hope she meets her baby in another place, another time.

And then I am pulled back to the present: I am Lee now, not her nurse and I reflect on how I feel like Dave's "other mother"; not this "real" mother. And a struggle now is how to tell Dave's children (my grandchildren) about this "other" grandmother. How do we negotiate the boundaries around telling the secret to the next generation?

"The unprotective mom" is still the most difficult chapter for me to read. I find myself going back to read the story and knowing it is going to hurt all over again but going back anyway and letting the pain rush over me. I read it with the hope that it will encourage me to do more; that it will encourage others to do more. I want to be braver and find the courage to

move this story forward to a more public audience with an expectation of outrage and the will to act. Perhaps I was hoping that the writing of this chapter would help me find my anger.

As I read "Secrets of Mothering" I realize that this is a phenomenon that I had not thought about before. I believe the use of myth in this chapter helped me to explore the complexity and messiness of secrets and the multiplicity of self in the revealing and concealing rather than looking at secrets of mothering as good or bad/right or wrong. I had not realized or understood the pull of the discourse and how my secrets were so closely linked to societal expectations. I am still trying to understand what is behind the revealing and concealing of these secrets. I was able to identify, to a certain degree, my criteria for revealing my secrets but I also realize that I am still concealing some of my secrets of mothering.

I am presenting at Nursing 990 research seminar on a/e as methodology and as I prepare I realize that I must decide what to tell them about my research within the hour time slot. I refer to the methodology chapter and select pieces to read that I think may be important and informative to the audience. The audience will not be familiar with a/e and I want to help them understand the importance and implications of this methodology. I also want to give them some examples of my stories and the emotionality of the subjective experience of writing in this novelistic way.

The day of the presentation arrives and as I enter the large lecture hall I see all the cameras set up for the teleconference with other sites in the province. I feel a moment of trepidation but look around and see some familiar and friendly faces. As usual it is mostly

faculty and students from nursing and medicine. I explain to the camera people that there is no power point and I will be sitting at a table to read. I can tell they think this is a bit odd but they quickly rearrange the room to accommodate my request. I feel rather small sitting here and I calm myself by thinking of my stories and the importance of engaging the audience and helping them understand a/e.

I read parts of the methodology chapter and parts of the stories I have read so many times - revised, rewritten, constructed and reconstructed - and I feel myself being pulled into the emotions and the meaning of the stories once again. I feel vulnerable and yet I feel some sense of freedom. I notice new things as I read and I resonate with things that seem very old and familiar now. I read with conviction and purpose and as I read about the mom down on the farm I can see McLeay with his crinkled neck in the swing chair and can feel the tightness in my chest when I read about the snow fort. But I don't read the story about Jordan or Dave and I realize that I am still protecting those secrets. I have changed things in the text for this reading, to avoid disclosing these two secrets. I understand a bit better now why this is but not entirely. The presentation helped me realize the hold of the discourse on me but also how it is still played out.

I am soon out of time and there is so much more I want to read and talk about but that will have to wait until another place and another time. There are a few questions and mostly comments: "That is the most interesting methodology piece I have ever heard." "If the purpose was to stir up emotion it certainly did that." "I can certainly relate to the struggles of mothering." "I never thought of the secrets of mothering before but we do pretend that we can

do it all and we don't share our struggles and we seldom tell anyone how it really is and how we really feel"

As I pack up my papers, one of the physicians comes up to speak with me. He says, "Didn't your mother or grandmother ever teach you how to mother?" I look at him for a moment and am not sure what he means. He goes on, "Aren't you making a big deal out of this?"

I smile at him and say, "Mothering is a big deal"

He replies, "I don't understand the issue. My wife and I raised three children and we didn't have any problems. My wife didn't find mothering difficult and she was always happy."

"Perhaps she was wearing the mask of motherhood that I referred to. Perhaps she did struggle but appeared happy and content on the outside."

"Oh come on," he says, "I can tell if someone is happy or not. I can tell within a few minutes of a patient entering my office if they are happy or not."

I reply, "Perhaps you could talk to your wife about this, you may be surprised."

He looks at me as if I am a hopeless case who has no ability to understand and he changes the subject. He seems quite uncomfortable with what I was saying - and perhaps that is a beginning.

I also used myth in Chapter VII to help unravel and make sense of my secrets of mothering. I wrote an analytic chapter and the whole time I was writing it I could hear

Carolyn Ellis' voice saying repeatedly "What are you doing? This is a/e. Stay with the form". But the more I tried the more difficult it became to story "analysis". One night before bed I was playing hooky from my usual "academic and a/e" readings and I reread Estes (1992) who has always spoken to me and inspired me. When I read the myth "Vasilisa" it spoke to me again at a very deep level and as I read I was saying "Yes, yes, yes...this has been my journey...this was a personal journey to get to a place where I could do this work."

Exploring my secrets of mothering using a/e as methodology would not have happened without the personal journey first. I had to know myself and like myself before I could find any degree of courage or strength to pursue this work. It also spoke to me about the broader issues and the ongoing journey of mothering and being.

I was listening to CBC Radio a few days later and I heard someone talking about writing about "self." One of the statements an author made was that, "to do this work you need to know who you are and why that is important." That resonated with me at that moment and I thought, "I am an ordinary woman who has had some extraordinary experiences and they are important to share." I have stories that are important to share because I want readers to understand mothering and moms in a different way and know how to talk to them and listen to them. I want readers to put their arms around young moms, illegitimate moms, old moms, single moms, gay/lesbian moms, struggling moms, hurting moms, scared moms, frustrated moms, too busy moms. Moms who care for their children and moms who can't. Moms who advocate for their children and moms who need the strength just

to survive. Moms who go to bed at night and promise to do a better job at mothering tomorrow and moms who cannot think that far ahead. Moms who stand on the edge of the discourse.

I reflect on Chapter VIII and I think of the success of the "Creating Safe Environments" project and the many other opportunities to disseminate this work. The project addresses issues explored in Chapter V "The unprotective mom" and hopefully a similar artistic approach may be used to disseminate the exploration of other chapters. I also think and reflect upon the determination and resilience of trauma. How it grips you, pulls you in, envelops you and has the potential to get in the way of living. It seems I need to work very hard at times not to let it swallow me up. That is the biggest challenge of going forward with this work; to do this work well you have to resist the pain and pull of the trauma and keep going and sometimes the only way to do that is to separate, to dissociate. How do I tell my stories, give presentations, publish and discuss this work without feeling the trauma each time or will each telling provide more healing especially if I feel that is worthy and useful for others, that it may make a difference.

When I read the methodology chapter now, I remember all the re-writes of that chapter. First writing it as a more traditional methodology chapter and then having it evolve with further revisions. However, I could not seem to write it in a storied way and it did not seem to fit with the other chapters. I then decided to write it in a conversational way similar to what Ellis and Bochner use. Carolyn Ellis often writes a conversation/discussion between her and Art to illustrate their thoughts and integrate the literature. When Pat reads it he says, "You make Debbie and I sound so intelligent."

And they were intelligent, thoughtful and insightful in our meetings. They started to sound like Art and Carolyn after awhile but to be true to the literature I wanted to use the language of the actual authors to give a clear explanation of a/e in a meaningful way similar to Ellis' approach. I believe this chapter would have been very useful to me when I first began learning about a/e as a research methodology.

The beginning of the ethics chapter was a request from Debbie to present at her research seminar about my journey through the ethics approval process. I recognize now as I read the chapter, the story behind the story; the evolution of the focus of my study. The focus shifted during the ethics approval process from a story/stories about Jordan's sexual abuse to the exploration of secrets and then the secrets of mothering. This chapter also highlights the multiplicity and complexity of mothering. Who did the ethics committee see when they looked at me?

I read the chapter now and I re-experience and re-vision the struggle, the frustration, the searching, the new knowledge, the emerging stories and my growing curiosity about the secrets of mothering - my secrets of mothering. I reflect on the process and realize and understand now that of all the literature I read to find support for what I was doing, I found the most validation and support from the Tri-Council Policy Statement itself and from Carolyn Ellis.

When I read and reflect on the epilogue I realize this is the beginning, not the end. Stories of mothering emerge every day.

I am trying to finish the final draft of my dissertation to send to Pat and Debbie, but Jordan is bored.

"I am almost done Sweetie. Won't it be exciting when I'm done? You can call me Dr. Murray instead of Mom," I say jokingly, and he covers his ears.

Jordan has been so patient and understanding throughout this whole process, but I can tell he is losing his patience and wants his mom back.

"I'm going biking," he says, "and then I'm going to the mall."

"Okay," I say, "Don't forget your cell phone."

He just looks at me and groans.

I feel guilty but if I have just a few more hours of peace and quiet, I can finish. I phone Jordan regularly to check on his whereabouts and to ease my guilt and concern. I call him again and there is no answer for a long time. I'm getting very worried when he finally answers.

"Where are you Jordan?" I ask.

"I'm at Safeway," he replies.

"What are you doing at Safeway?" I inquire.

"I'm looking for something to eat; there is no food in the house," he replies.

"What are you going to buy? Do you have enough money?" I ask feeling guiltier by the minute.

"I'm going to get a sandwich or something, and I have enough money. And quit calling me; you are starting to tick me off," he scolds me.

"Okay, see you shortly," I meekly reply and think, "I wonder if he has enough money to buy me one, too."



The autoethnography regarding my secrets of mothering is never over; it is never finished. Every day is another story. And stories bring possibility and hope. Stories break the silence and stories shed a light on secrets. I leave you with my stories; I leave them . . .

To All Mothers,

Those in silence and those who scream

Those who were believed and those who were ignored

Those who are surviving, those who are thriving

And those who are just making it a day at a time:

Those walking, those soaring, those crawling, and those lying quite still on the path to wholeness.

May this work help you remember the power of your wings.

(Originally written for survivors in Bryant-Davis, T., 2005).

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